



PHD

**Modernist awareness and responsiveness to socio-political change in the work of Christoph Hein**

Bevan, Simon

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**Modernist awareness and responsiveness  
to socio-political change in the work  
of Christoph Hein**

**submitted by Simon Bevan  
for the degree of PhD  
of the University of Bath  
2002**

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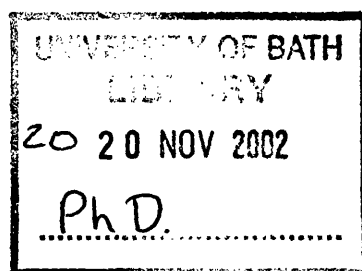
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## SUMMARY

Christoph Hein is among the best known of the former GDR's middle generation of authors, with an international reputation deriving from his playwriting and, in particular, his prose work. This thesis concentrates on two distinctive features of his prose-writing career. Firstly, his style has derived from modernist influences, notably Camus, in a way which contrasts markedly with the often prolonged struggle of his contemporaries to liberate themselves from the conventions of socialist realism. Secondly, Hein has combined creative success with a vigorous public role as an intellectual, an achievement which deserves serious attention in the context of the socio-political transition from the GDR to reunified Germany. The thesis integrates a study of these two features within a structure which devotes a chapter to each of his main publications. It begins with an examination of Hein's first collection of short stories, *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* (1980), which reveals experimentation with narrative perspective and a greater debt to the traditions of Hebel and Kleist than to modernism. The major breakthrough in Hein's prose-writing career is then shown to have occurred with a strikingly innovative piece of modernist writing, *Der fremde Freund* (1982). The momentum is maintained in *Horns Ende* (1985), a rich collage of eyewitness accounts of events in a small East German town in the 1950s. Hein's third major prose-work, *Der Tangospieler*, published shortly before the 'Wende', shifts to a third-person perspective on a GDR-based figure who is characterised by boredom. After looking in detail at Hein's important public role in the reunification process, we will see him break new ground in portraying a chillingly calculating character in *Das Napoleon-Spiel* (1993). Finally, the setting returns to 1950s GDR in Hein's most autobiographical work, *Von allem Anfang an* (1997), which confirms his status as one of the leading writers in reunified Germany.

# **INTRODUCTION**

## **BIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW**

Christoph Hein was born in Silesia on 8 April 1944. Following the end of the war, after a brief spell in Thuringia, his family settled in Bad Dübén, near Leipzig, where he spent his childhood. Hein left Saxony for West Berlin in 1958 in order to study for his 'Abitur', after having been prevented from attending 'Oberschule' in the GDR due to the ideological unsuitability of his father's profession as pastor. He was spending his summer holidays in the GDR when the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961, which meant that he could not return to complete his school education in West Berlin. Throughout the 1960s, he took various part-time jobs in addition to studying at evening classes for his GDR 'Abitur', which he passed in the mid-1960s. After again encountering problems with the state authorities over his preferred choice of university studies (he was barred from taking courses in dramaturgy), he decided to study philosophy and subsequently logic at the University of Leipzig. In 1970 he moved to East Berlin, where he worked throughout the following decade at the 'Volksbühne', firstly as dramaturge and then 'Hausautor'. Hein left his job at the theatre in 1979 after Benno Besson and other members of staff at the theatre had resigned over

government interference in their work: in that year alone, productions of plays by Hein had been postponed fifteen times. Hein's first piece of prose was published the following year.

My thesis will pick up Hein's career at this point and will focus on his prose writing throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with a chapter devoted to each of his main prose works: *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* (1980), *Der fremde Freund* (1982), *Horns Ende* (1985), *Der Tangospieler* (1989), *Das Napoleon-Spiel* (1993) and *Von allem Anfang an* (1997). The chapter on *Der Tangospieler* will contain a subsection on the short stories *Exekution eines Kalbes* which, although not published as a collection until 1994, were written between 1977 and 1990.

Today, Hein is one of the best known of the former GDR's middle generation of authors, with a reputation which has derived largely from his innovative prose writing. In contrast to many GDR writers who had difficulty in breaking away from the conventions of socialist realism, Hein's prose style has, from an early stage in his career, derived from modernist influences. In addition to producing innovative prose, Hein has also performed a vigorous public role as an intellectual during the period under examination here, particularly around the time of the 'Wende'. I will examine this period in a separate chapter, which fits in a neat chronological way between *Der Tangospieler* and *Das Napoleon-Spiel*.

My thesis will seek to combine an analysis of these two elements - modernist awareness and responsiveness to socio-political change - in Hein's career. I will expand upon the precise focus later in this introduction. Before then, in order to clarify the context for Hein's prose works, I will outline the main cultural

developments in the GDR up to his first publication and introduce the principal features of the modernist movement, which will be central to my analysis. I will then summarise the research already undertaken on Hein in order to provide a framework for my study.

## **MODERNISM AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SOCIALIST REALISM**

As the title of the book *Modernism 1890-1930*,<sup>1</sup> edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, indicates, modernism has its roots in the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Writing in this book, Michael Hollington argues that “the keynote of modernism is liberation, an ironic distrust of all absolutes, including those of temporal or spatial form”.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the nineteenth-century realist movement, which aimed to offer an objective description of external reality, the modernists sought to reveal a deeper, more subjectively orientated reality. The distrust of absolutes can be seen in the narration and plot of modernist works. David Lodge contends:

Modern fiction eschews the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of a reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrator. It employs, instead, either a single limited point of view, or multiple viewpoints, all more or less limited or fallible; and it tends towards a complex or fluid handling of time, involving much cross-reference back and forward across the temporal span of the action.<sup>3</sup>

There are two points to consider here: the narrative viewpoint and the treatment of time. In the narration of modernist works, readers can no longer rely on an omniscient narrator to fill in the gaps left by the characters. Instead, they have to

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism 1890-1930* (London, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Hollington, ‘Svevo, Joyce and modernist time’ in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism 1890-1930*, pp.430-442, here p.432.

<sup>3</sup> David Lodge, ‘The language of modernist fiction: metaphor and metonymy’ in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism 1890-1930*, pp.481-496, here p.481.

take on a more active, creative role themselves since they often encounter, as David Lodge says, a single, restricted viewpoint or multiple narrators who may offer conflicting viewpoints of the same event. As for the treatment of time, there is often no clearly defined starting point for modernist stories, and the ending can be open and ambiguous. In his introduction to modernism, Randall Stevenson argues that there is a degree of hostility towards a rigid definition and standardisation of time in the works of many modernist writers and the clock is often used as a menacing symbol.<sup>4</sup> These instances of apparent complications in modernist fiction serve the purpose of providing a more accurate reflection of the human mind and experience.

Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27) was very important for the way it highlighted the difficulty of depicting the passing of time and recounting past time through memory. In Proust's opinion, involuntary memory (where a sensuous stimulant sends a person back to a given point in the past) is more authentic than voluntary memory (where a person recognises the time lag between the past and present). The implication of this for his plot was that events from the past were mixed with the present in flashback and flashforward. The 'stream of consciousness', as employed by James Joyce in *Ulysses*, provided an extreme example of the modernist aim of recreating the workings of the human mind. It rejected conventions of speech patterns and paragraphing in favour of a style of language and a chaotic ordering of ideas which moved beyond a neat surface description of reality.

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<sup>4</sup> Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction. An Introduction* (Hertfordshire, 1992), pp.83-153.

Modernist writers express scepticism for the idea that words have the power to communicate our consciousness and feel frustration at working through a medium which has become reduced to mere 'counters'. Richard Sheppard has described this as a "crisis of language" where, for instance, the traditional role of the adjective in describing the external reality of a noun is called into question.<sup>5</sup> The most important result of this crisis of language and narration for modernists is that language and form move away from the role of providing a framework for the content of the work towards a more autonomous existence of their own, or, in Samuel Beckett's words, towards a situation where "form *is* content, content *is* form".<sup>6</sup>

Although modernism was widely adopted by the cultural avant-garde which thrived in 1920s Russia in the wake of the Soviet Revolution, the advent of Joseph Stalin in 1922 put an abrupt end to this first attempt to link political commitment to cultural innovation. Rejecting modernism, Stalin formulated a cultural programme of socialist realism in the early 1930s which aimed to educate the worker in the spirit of socialism through a style which was reassuring and simple. In this literature, a working-class hero would typically be confronted with a problem, overcome it and thus provide an example for the reader to follow. It aspired to the social totality of the great epics of the past and was recounted by a partisan narrator. Things considered modern - such as forms of montage, complex narrative approaches and interruptions to the chronological progress of the plot - were rejected for fear of confusing the reader.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Sheppard, 'The crisis of language' in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism 1890-1930*, pp.323-336, here p.329.

<sup>6</sup> Beckett is quoted by Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction. An Introduction*, p.182.



The theory of socialist realism was refined by the Hungarian Marxist philosopher and literary critic Georg Lukács, who championed a modified form of the classic German novel of education, the 'Entwicklungsroman', which was to prove particularly attractive to German authors in Soviet exile during the Third Reich and later to authors working in the GDR.<sup>7</sup> This modification of socialist realism aimed to provide a more substantial cultural framework for literature than the exhortation to create totality. In Rodney Livingstone's words: "What seems to survive is the notion that the good socialist-realist writer is in all essentials similar to a traditional bourgeois realist except that he writes as a conscious socialist".<sup>8</sup> Lukács advocated the use of an omniscient narrator as found in nineteenth-century literature and rejected the modernist practice of describing events from the subjective point of view of the participant. According to J.H. Reid, Lukács rejected technical features such as montage as being decadent and a kind of "fashionable gimmick".<sup>9</sup>

In the aftermath of the Second World War, after another brief period of modernist experimentation in the still open city of Berlin, the Soviet Union under Stalin began establishing its influence on the eastern zone of defeated Germany. The Soviets naturally exercised a strong influence on political and economic developments, but they also had a major bearing on cultural policy in the eastern zone and subsequently the GDR. That the intention was for the theory of socialist realism to be transferred to Germany rather than the less dogmatic variant espoused by Lukács was indicated in 1948 when the cultural politician Alexander Abusch gave a speech under the title 'Der Schriftsteller und der Plan'

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<sup>7</sup> For more details, see Dennis Tate, *The East German Novel. Identity, Conformity, Continuity* (Bath, 1984), pp.12-50.

<sup>8</sup> Rodney Livingstone, 'Georg Lukács and socialist realism' in Michael Scriven and Dennis Tate (eds), *European Socialist Realism* (Oxford, 1988), pp.13-30, here p.16.

<sup>9</sup> J.H. Reid, *Writing Without Taboos. The New East German Literature* (New York, 1990), p.78.

which provided an early insight into the state's goal of committing writers to helping socialism prevail.

In these early post-war years, the young Christoph Hein and his family were settling in Bad Dübén near Leipzig. Elsewhere in Germany, this period witnessed the return of writers such as Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers and Arnold Zweig who had spent their exile years outside the restrictive context of the Soviet Union. The effective use they had made of typically modernist techniques in their exile writings raised hopes that the GDR was going to be open to multi-cultural influences. Furthermore, despite the early indication of the state's intention to use art to promote its socio-political goals, the cultural policy in the Soviet-occupied zone had initially appeared to be fairly non-prescriptive: the central task of literary policy was removing all books which were classified as pertaining to national socialism from public libraries.<sup>10</sup> But, from the outset, a pattern became established in cultural policy which was to continue throughout the GDR's existence whereby signs of a more relaxed approach were generally followed by a period of repression.

By 1951, a campaign against modernism was underway, led by hard-line figures in the cultural establishment such as Abusch and Alfred Kurella. In March of that year, the Central Committee of the SED made cultural developments in the GDR the main issue of its fifth plenum. Socialist realism was held up as a binding doctrine, and formalism in art and literature, defined as a movement which placed its emphasis on the form rather than content of art, became the target for much criticism. The campaign attacked elements of culture which were

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<sup>10</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), p.74.

held to be morally decadent and was directed against modernism in general, as exemplified by authors such as Kafka, Proust, Camus and Sartre. The SED claimed that the innovative use of formalist techniques (emphasising form over content) in these writers' literature made it esoteric and elitist - therefore contradicting the principles of the new socialist state - and that their perspective on reality was nihilistic.<sup>11</sup> In truth, much of the impetus for this campaign came not so much from a fear that innovation in literary form would challenge the principles of communism, but from a wish to control cultural content as a propaganda tool. As Reid says, it is notable that more traditionally realist writers such as Hemingway, Greene and Steinbeck were also viewed as unacceptable because they were not overtly socialist.<sup>12</sup>

Two years later, the Soviet Union asserted its political authority over the GDR by quelling the workers' uprising in Berlin, an event which is recounted in the first piece of long prose examined in this thesis, *Der fremde Freund*. Yet after the death of Stalin in the same year, 1953, the mid-1950s witnessed a period of comparative liberalism, and a more open debate on writers such as Sartre and Faulkner took place. In the backlash after the Hungarian uprising of 1956 (which features in the last book by Hein to be examined in this thesis, *Von allem Anfang an*), however, a tougher political and cultural line set in again, ultimately culminating in the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Before the Hungarian uprising, Lukács had served as Minister for Education there in the alternative government set up by Imre Nagy and he subsequently distanced himself from socialist realism more radically than previously in the essays collected in *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* (1958). But, with the Soviet repression, Lukács

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, pp.118-119.

<sup>12</sup> J.H. Reid, *Writing Without Taboos*, p.32.

became an easy target. For a long time, it was not permitted to quote him, he was politically ostracised and almost executed. His excommunication also had consequences in the GDR as some intellectuals and authors who had dared to think about a reform of Stalinist socialism in the GDR, such as Walter Janka and Wolfgang Harich, were sentenced to imprisonment in 1957. The oppressive intellectual atmosphere around this period is recalled by Hein in *Horns Ende*.

It is difficult to identify with complete certainty the publication of one particular book as representing the breakthrough of modernism in the work of authors living in the GDR. Wolfgang Emmerich considers Uwe Johnson's *Mutmaßungen über Jakob* (1959), with its multi-narrator approach, to be a seminal work of GDR modernism, even though it was never actually granted publication there.<sup>13</sup> It appeared instead in West Germany, at which point Johnson left the GDR for the Federal Republic. Emmerich views Johnson and the dramatist Heiner Müller as forerunners of a development towards greater subjectivity and cultural innovation which was to become more widespread by the end of the 1960s through authors such as Christa Wolf and Volker Braun.<sup>14</sup> *Juninachmittag* (1967) and *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (which had been due to be published in 1968 but was delayed until 1969) demonstrated Wolf's talent in using modernist techniques such as inner monologue, flashback and an individual's subjective perspective, thus marking a significant development from her previous works such as *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963). In *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, the protagonist is a victim of a society which is unable to incorporate non-conformist figures like her into the socialist project.

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<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, 'Gleichzeitigkeit. Vormoderne, Moderne und Postmoderne in der Literatur der DDR' in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), *Bestandsaufnahme Gegenwartsliteratur: Bundesrepublik Deutschland Deutsche Demokratische Republik Österreich Schweiz* [Text & Kritik special edition] (Munich, 1988), pp.193-211, here p.201.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p.174 and p.284.

One explanation for this change of emphasis is that, in the 1960s, the political elite started referring to the situation in the GDR as constituting 'real existierender Sozialismus'. The GDR was seen as being something already, rather than being on the way there. This view of the GDR as an acceptable example of a socialist state infuriated many writers who were convinced that much progress was still needed before the state would merit such a description. That the 1960s remained a difficult period was demonstrated at the eleventh plenum of the SED Central Committee in 1965 where numerous films and books were banned. The plenum attacked everything modernist, with writers such as Wolf Biermann, Volker Braun and Stefan Heym pilloried. The disillusionment was compounded three years later: the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968, which we encounter in *Der Tangospieler*, marked, in Hein's view, the end of hopes that the socialist countries could be reformed.<sup>15</sup>

The 1970s continued the pattern of signs of a more liberalised approach followed by repression. The early 70s, with the appointment of Erich Honecker as First Secretary of the SED and his speech at the fourth plenum of the Central Committee in December 1971, gave grounds for hopes that there would be "no taboos" in culture. The first half of the decade was one of real productivity for writers such as Ulrich Plenzdorf and Volker Braun. Plenzdorf, who had read Salinger's book about teenager rebellion *The Catcher in the Rye* in translation by Annemarie and Heinrich Böll, published his own story of a young person's alienation, *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, in 1973, after it had appeared in

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, 'Dialog ist das Gegenteil von Belehren' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft. Christoph Hein. Ein Arbeitsbuch. Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie* (Berlin and Weimar, 1992), pp.11-50, here p.42.

*Sinn und Form* the previous March. Its publication reflected a more relaxed atmosphere at that time. The banning of Braun's *Unvollendete Geschichte* at the end of 1975<sup>16</sup> was the first sign of a fresh crisis. This was confirmed by the expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976 and the subsequent imposition of sanctions against many intellectuals. From the end of 1976, a large-scale departure of writers and intellectuals from the GDR took place. In 1978, Erich Loest's *Es geht seinen Gang*, which had just managed to avoid censorship in its first publication, was not allowed to be published in a second edition. One year later, Stefan Heym was fined for publishing *Collin* in the West, and similar sanctions were imposed on the philosopher Robert Havemann. This prompted a group of authors to write to Honecker to complain of the increasing defamation of critical authors. In June 1979, Heym and Klaus Schlesinger among others were excluded from the Writers' Union.<sup>17</sup>

As already mentioned, 1979 was also the year in which fifteen planned productions of plays by Hein failed to take place. The previous year, he had given an interview to *Theater der Zeit* in which he had stated: "Das gegenwärtige Theater ist Schreibanlaß für Prosa".<sup>18</sup> He has since qualified the suggestion that it was the censorship of drama which led him to write prose, claiming that he would probably have made this move anyway.<sup>19</sup> Whatever the reason, his first piece of prose was published soon afterwards in 1980, the point where my thesis will begin. But before starting my analysis of each of his major

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<sup>16</sup> Like Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, it too had initially been published in *Sinn und Form*.

<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p.260.

<sup>18</sup> 'Ein Interview. Christoph Hein antwortet auf Fragen von "Theater der Zeit"', *Theater der Zeit*, 7/1978, pp.51-52.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Bill Niven and David Clarke, 'Ich arbeite nicht in der Abteilung Prophet' in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein* (Cardiff, 2000), pp.14-24, here p.17.

prose works, I will set out the main areas of critical interest in Hein in Germany and the English-speaking world from 1980 to the present.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly interest in Hein developed steadily over the period I will study in this thesis. In the GDR, *Weimarer Beiträge* carried a for-and-against discussion of *Der fremde Freund* in 1983 consisting of responses by six critics.<sup>20</sup> *Neue deutsche Literatur* published essays on *Der fremde Freund* and *Horns Ende*<sup>21</sup> in the years following their respective publication, and *Sinn und Form* printed a lengthy interview with Hein in 1988.<sup>22</sup> In 1982, Hein was awarded the prestigious Heinrich Mann prize of the 'Akademie der Künste'. In West Germany, Hein won prizes from the 'Verband deutscher Kritiker', West Berlin, in 1984, and from the 'Neue Literarische Gesellschaft, Hamburg', in 1986, for *Der fremde Freund* and *Horns Ende* respectively. His work was published in the West by Luchterhand. The period around the fall of the Berlin Wall saw the publication of the first monographs and collections of essays on Hein in East and West.

Edited by Lothar Baier, *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*<sup>23</sup> appeared shortly after German reunification. In his introduction, Baier cites the title of Hein's essay collection *Öffentlich arbeiten* as the best label to characterise Hein's approach to writing, and he stresses Hein's ability to cross the traditional literary

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<sup>20</sup> Rüdiger Bernhardt, Klaus Kändler, Bernd Leistner et al., "'Der fremde Freund" von Christoph Hein', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 9/1983, pp.1635-1655.

<sup>21</sup> Brigitte Böttcher, 'Diagnose eines unheilbaren Zustandes. Christoph Hein "Der fremde Freund"', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 6/1983, pp.145-149 and Gabriele Lindner, 'Ein geistiger Widergänger', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 10/1986, pp.155-161.

<sup>22</sup> See Krzysztof Jachimczak, 'Gespräch mit Christoph Hein', *Sinn und Form*, 2/1988, pp.343-359. Reprinted as 'Wir werden es lernen müssen, mit unserer Vergangenheit zu leben' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp.45-67.

<sup>23</sup> Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990).

boundaries between essay, prose and drama writing. The collection contains an article and speech by Hein, reprints of interviews and articles on his prose work up to *Der Tangospieler*. Baier's was not the only collection on Hein to appear in 1990. Bernd Fischer published *Christoph Hein: Drama und Prosa im letzten Jahrzehnt der DDR*<sup>24</sup> in which he identified a simplicity and exactness in Hein's writing which, from as early as *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*, becomes his trademark. That the *Text & Kritik* series devoted a volume to Hein in 1991<sup>25</sup> provided evidence of his growing reputation. It follows the series pattern of an article by the author, critiques of his main works and an interview. Further monographs were published in the early 1990s by Heinz-Peter Preußner on 'Zivilisationskritik'<sup>26</sup> and Ines Zekert on the influence of Walter Benjamin in Hein's work.<sup>27</sup>

The most extensive bibliography of Hein's work up to the 'Wende' can be found in the workbook edited by Klaus Hammer and published in 1992.<sup>28</sup> The book includes both original and previously published contributions on and by Hein. In part one, which consists of an interview between Hein and Hammer and Hein's article 'Eure Freiheit ist unser Auftrag. Ein Brief an (fast alle) Ausländer - wider das Gerede vom Fremdenhaß der Deutschen', we encounter Hein in the first person. Part two of the workbook consists of secondary literature on Hein's work and part three is devoted to a selection of reviews from the press on Hein's

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<sup>24</sup> Bernd Fischer, *Christoph Hein: Drama und Prosa im letzten Jahrzehnt der DDR* (Heidelberg, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Frauke Meyer-Gosau (ed.), *Christoph Hein* [Text & Kritik 111] (Munich, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> Heinz-Peter Preußner, *Zivilisationskritik und literarische Öffentlichkeit. Strukturelle und wertungstheoretische Untersuchungen zu erzählenden Texten Christoph Heins* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> Ines Zekert, *Untersuchungen zu poetischen und geschichtsphilosophischen Positionen Christoph Heins unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Walter-Benjamin-Rezeption* (University of Leipzig, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft. Christoph Hein. Ein Arbeitsbuch. Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie* (Berlin and Weimar, 1992).



drama.

Proof of Hein's blossoming international standing came with the publication in the USA of *Understanding Christoph Hein* by Phillip McKnight in 1995,<sup>29</sup> which provides a useful introduction to Hein for English-speaking readers. In the UK, three PhD theses were written on Hein in the 1990s.<sup>30</sup> Julian Rayner investigates the concept of Hein as a chronicler, Hilary Wieseemann examines the influence of religion and modernism in Hein's work, and David Clarke analyses the continuity in Hein's literary development in terms of his search for a quality of community and solidarity which neither German society in which he has lived has fostered.

A further two volumes have been published on Hein recently. Bill Niven and David Clarke edited a volume on Hein in a series on contemporary German writers. The publication includes an interview and essay by Hein, an article by his lector at Aufbau Verlag Angela Drescher and further articles by British and German specialists in German studies.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, following a conference under the title 'Christoph Hein: Ein Chronist seiner Zeit', held at Vlotho, Lower Saxony in July 1999, Graham Jackman edited a volume of the papers given at the conference by German, British and American scholars. The collection, which appeared as a volume of the *German Monitor* series, covers Hein's prose and

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<sup>29</sup> Phillip McKnight, *Understanding Christoph Hein* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Julian Rayner, *Christoph Hein: The Concept and Development of the Role of the Chronicler* (unpublished PhD thesis) (University of Edinburgh, 1997); Hilary Wieseemann, 'Ohne Hoffnung können wir nicht leben'. *Atheist Modernism and Religion in the Works of Christoph Hein* (unpublished PhD Thesis) (University of Sheffield, 1998); David Clarke, 'Diese merkwürdige Kleinigkeit einer Vision': *Continuity in Christoph Hein's Prose Fiction* (unpublished PhD thesis) (University of Wales, Swansea, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein* (Cardiff, 2000).

drama and includes a translation of his play *Die wahre Geschichte des Ah Q*.<sup>32</sup>

## MY FOCUS

As I have already mentioned, the aims of this thesis are to evaluate Hein's awareness of modernism and his responsiveness to socio-political change in the 1980s and 1990s. Although a study of an author's awareness of modernism in the 1980s comes nearly a century after the modernist movement first emerged, these are, in GDR terms, still relatively early days. As we will see in the course of this thesis, Hein regularly makes claims that he does not consider himself to be in a position from which he can judge characters and thus provide recommendations on how readers should lead their lives.<sup>33</sup> This will be central to my investigation into whether he considers it possible to attach any moral dimension to his work, which, considering his comment that "Literatur hat mit Moral nichts zu tun",<sup>34</sup> might initially appear doubtful. Randall Stevenson, however, reminds us that there are good reasons to be sceptical of this claim when he argues that "it may be that the most moral sort of text is the one that leaves readers free to determine morality for themselves".<sup>35</sup>

I will pay special attention to the network of links to the work of Albert Camus in Hein's prose. In 1987, in an interview in which he expressed his admiration for French thought in general, Hein referred positively to Camus as the last

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<sup>32</sup> Graham Jackman (ed.), *Christoph Hein in Perspective* [German Monitor 51] (Amsterdam – Atlanta, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> See for instance the interview with Krzysztof Jachimczak, 'Wir werden es lernen müssen, mit unserer Vergangenheit zu leben' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*, p.52.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, 'Dialog ist das Gegenteil von Belehren' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft*, p.11.

<sup>35</sup> Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction. An Introduction*, p.218.

major representative of a French heritage in which critical analysis of society and literary innovation are effectively combined:

Pour moi il y a dans la pensée française une ligne tout à fait fondamentale qui va de Pascal et Voltaire jusqu'à Sartre et Camus, c'est un héritage de la philosophie du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, un ensemble fait de réflexion rationaliste, d'analyse critique, de curiosité intellectuelle. [...] C'est cette attitude critique, cet esprit ouvert et novateur qui ont fait de la France le centre de l'Europe au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.<sup>36</sup>

As a leading modernist writer, Camus provides an interesting point of reference for an examination of Hein's awareness of modernist narrative structures. I will argue that each of Hein's works lends itself to a comparison with one of the major prose works by Camus, notably *L'étranger* (1942, 1948 in German), *La peste* (1947, 1949), *La chute* (1956, 1957) and *Le premier homme* (published posthumously in 1994, 1995). Most of these publications emerged against the background of the debate about committed literature which transcended the political division of Europe. During a trip to Sweden to collect his Nobel prize, Camus rejected the concept of socialist realism with the pragmatic question: "How [...] can socialist realism be possible when reality is not entirely socialist?"<sup>37</sup> In his acceptance speech for his Nobel prize, Camus made a revealing statement about his understanding of the role of artists: "Les vrais artistes ne méprisent rien: ils s'obligent à comprendre au lieu de juger".<sup>38</sup>

Beyond modernist awareness, there are more general links between the two figures. Like Hein, Camus also wrote novels, plays and essays. Hein has spoken

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Nicole Bary, 'Christoph Hein, la RDA, la France, l'Europe', *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, 1-15 September 1987.

<sup>37</sup> Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus. A Life* (translated by Benjamin Ivry) (London, 1998), p.381.

<sup>38</sup> Albert Camus, *Discours de Suède* (Paris, 1958), p.13.

of his appreciation of the stimulus which the switches of form offer<sup>39</sup> (“es hat für mich was Anregendes”). Furthermore, both writers have been active in the field of journalism. Camus wrote for or edited, amongst others, *Paris Soir* and the resistance newspaper *Combat*. Hein is still on the board of directors of the weekly *Freitag*, which he joined in 1992 and for which he has written many articles.

Such journalistic work reveals a broad commitment to making a direct impact on society, although Camus and Hein both underline the predominance of their artistic work. Towards the end of the Second World War, Camus was asked whether he was worried about being trapped in an ivory tower of literature. Todd quotes him as saying:

Far be it for me to say that given the choice between creation and political engagement, I choose creation. For some years now I have done the contrary. And for the past six months it is also true that I have not written a line for myself - I suppose that's what being engaged means. But you asked me if I thought that a new party must be created, because I do not feel like registering in any existing one. To create a party takes all of a man's time and energy, and I don't believe I am that man. I'm already serving politics, history and man in my own way, which is a double way. First, I fight as a basic militant; second, I use language to define what I think is right.<sup>40</sup>

Around the time of the ‘Wende’, during which Hein had been particularly active in speaking at meetings and demonstrations and writing articles, Hein said:

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Bill Niven and David Clarke, ‘Ich arbeite nicht in der Abteilung Prophet’ in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein*, p.17.

<sup>40</sup> Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus. A Life*, p.248.

Seit Wochen mache ich alles mögliche, nur nicht meine Arbeit. Ich hoffe, daß ich bald wieder an meinen Schreibtisch zurückkehren kann. Ich bin kein Politiker und kein Journalist. Aber momentan denke ich schon, daß es Gründe gibt für ein paar Aktivitäten, die nichts mit Literatur zu tun haben.<sup>41</sup>

These general similarities and a recurrence of modernist elements in their respective works will be examined in greater detail throughout the chapters of this thesis.

In order to gauge the socio-political context for Hein's work, the publication history of each of his books will be a fruitful point of reference. The correspondence between Hein's lector Günther Drommer and the censorship authority, the 'Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel' (a subsection of the Ministry of Culture), now accessible at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin, provides valuable material in this respect and an insight into the development of attitudes in GDR cultural policy circles throughout the 1980s.<sup>42</sup> The HV was responsible for issuing 'printing licences', which, as Emmerich says, was little more than a euphemism for censorship.<sup>43</sup> Any book which was due for publication in the GDR had to be presented to the HV, led from 1973 by Klaus Höpcke. This office worked in conjunction with the head of the culture department of the SED Central Committee (to which the Writers' Union of the GDR was directly accountable) and the relevant Politbüro member, for many years Ursula Ragwitz and Kurt Hager respectively. Publication of texts was not permitted without a

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Irmtraud Gutschke, 'Ich bin ein Schreiber von Chroniken', *Neues Deutschland*, 2/3 December 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* (Berlin and Weimar, 1990), pp.201-207, here p.207.

<sup>42</sup> In my thesis, I will refer to two types of files. Those beginning with 'DR1' are from the Ministry of Culture and contain correspondence about 'Druckgenehmigungen' for Aufbau books for the relevant year. Those beginning with 'DY30/vorl.SED' are from the cultural affairs office of the SED Central Committee.

<sup>43</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p.52.

printing licence. The correspondence between authors or their lectors and the state authorities constituted another euphemism – ‘Literatureentwicklungsprozesse’ – which in reality meant instructions from the state about perceived necessary cuts or amendments and the writer’s response to this. The battle over the publication of *Horns Ende*, for instance, provides an illuminating example of the way in which these processes worked.

I will also move beyond the GDR to study the generally successful way in which Hein has adapted to post-‘Wende’ life. But my chronological approach to Hein’s work means that I will take the beginning of the 1980s as my starting point. It is generally accepted that things became easier for writers during this the last decade of the GDR, as Hein himself has acknowledged.<sup>44</sup> The number of taboos decreased, Kafka was published and Beckett performed. In 1988, the year in which Volker Braun’s *Unvollendete Geschichte* was published in book form in the GDR for the first time, Emmerich wrote:

Das normative Zentrum ist nach wie vor die ästhetische Vor- und Antimoderne des ‘sozialistischen Realismus’, doch die Kulturpolitik hat in den letzten zehn Jahren erstaunliche Zugeständnisse an die Moderne gemacht, theoretischer wie praktischer Natur, so daß man regelrecht von der ‘Rehabilitierung einer einst verfemten Moderne und Avantgarde’ sprechen kann.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, according to Reid, taboos persisted when it came to questioning the authority of the SED,<sup>46</sup> and, as my analysis of Christoph Hein’s work in the

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<sup>44</sup> Hein made this comment at Swansea University in March 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, ‘Gleichzeitigkeit. Vormoderne, Moderne und Postmoderne in der Literatur der DDR’ in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), *Bestandsaufnahme Gegenwartsliteratur* [Text & Kritik special edition], p.209.

<sup>46</sup> J.H. Reid, *Writing Without Taboos*, p.56.

1980s will show, there were other areas considered highly problematic by party officials, primarily the critical portrayal of GDR history. Indeed, history and characters' attitudes to accessing the past through their memories will emerge as a key theme in this thesis.

It would certainly be wrong to think that, in the 1980s, GDR cultural policy figureheads abandoned the idea that artists had an important role to fulfil in consolidating the GDR's image and status. In 1982, the year of the publication of Hein's first major success, *Der fremde Freund*, Ragwitz sent a draft Politbüro statement setting out SED cultural policy goals to her colleague Geggel at the department of 'Agitation'. It stated:

Kultur und Kunst haben in den achtziger Jahren mehr als je zuvor die Aufgabe, das Schöpfungstum, den Leistungswillen und das Wohlbefinden der Werktätigen zu fördern, sozialistische Überzeugungen und Verhaltensweisen zu festigen und kommunistische Ideale herauszubilden und damit zur Entwicklung sozialistischer Persönlichkeiten und zur Ausprägung der sozialistischen Lebensweise beizutragen.<sup>47</sup>

Two years before this, in 1980, Erich Honecker had reaffirmed the importance he attached to literature: "Ich bin fest davon überzeugt, daß man nicht wirklich Kommunist sein kann, ohne Achtung vor den schöpferischen Leistungen des Volkes und den Werken seiner großen Dichter und Denker zu haben".<sup>48</sup> This then was the cultural policy context for Hein's literary debut, the collection of short stories entitled *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*.

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<sup>47</sup> This quote can be found on page two of the document entitled 'Stellungnahme des Politbüros zum Bericht der Bezirksleitung Berlin über die Durchführung der Kulturpolitik des X. Parteitages der SED', file DY30/vorl. SED/30126 at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin.

<sup>48</sup> Erich Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben* (Berlin, 1980), p.347.

# CHAPTER 1

## Explorations of 'small' history: an apprenticeship in prose writing - *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

The eleven short stories collected under the title *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* marked Hein's change of direction from drama towards prose. *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* was originally published in the GDR by Aufbau Verlag in 1980.<sup>2</sup> When it appeared in the West two years later, it not only had a different title, *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*,<sup>3</sup> the order of the stories had been modified<sup>4</sup> and the one entitled 'Der Sohn' removed altogether. After the 'Wende', Aufbau produced a new edition, with the stories in their original order, under the West German title.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Hein, *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* (Berlin and Weimar, 1980). Page references in the text are to the 1994 Aufbau Taschenbuch edition *Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen*.

<sup>2</sup> The original edition in the GDR appeared in two versions. The reason for this concerned the lithographs by Hermann Naumann which accompanied the text. Naumann had produced eleven stones, only for the publishers to decide that the maximum they could afford was four. At the last minute, they changed their mind and requested eight, with the result that those originally chosen were maintained in the first version and different ones were published in a second version of the same edition. For more information, see Harald Kiesel, 'Texte und Bilder', *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, 29 March 1994, p.16.

<sup>3</sup> This is the name of one of the stories in the collection.

<sup>4</sup> The first and last stories swapped positions.

<sup>5</sup> The 1994 edition is not entirely the same as the original since the afterword by Hein's lector Günther Drommer is omitted.



This move to prose did not mean however that he stopped writing drama from this point onwards, for new plays by Hein continued to appear throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Earlier ones, such as *Cromwell* and *Lassalle fragt Herrn Herbert nach Sonja. Die Szene ein Salon*, had revealed Hein's interest in historical figures. This interest is underlined in his first prose collection as *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* opens with a story of the same name (pp.5-24) about the seventeenth-century French dramatist Jean Racine.

### PRE-TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOURCES

The image we have in 'Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois' of the fifty-nine-year-old Racine during his morning toilet prior to a carriage ride to Versailles is that of a fragile and weak man. In contrast to the sickness and lethargy he now embodies, Racine recalls how healthy and fit he had been in Holland, the scene of an important event in his past. During an excursion there as chronicler to the king's suite, he had taken leave of the royal party for a few days and encountered two terrible crimes in the village of Neerwinden. Firstly, a woman had been raped and murdered in a stable. Although three officers had been accused of the crime, the investigation had been abandoned "um höhere Interessen nicht zu inkommodieren" (p.10). Secondly, despite official claims that a farmer who had reported the three officers had apparently committed suicide, the fact that he had been stabbed twenty times with a pitchfork rendered this claim rather dubious, to say the least.

Racine's decision not to report these instances of injustice in his chronicle of the king's journey obviously causes him unease, despite his futile attempts to justify this retrospectively. He plays down the significance of his role: "Was hätte er

ausrichten können. Er, ein kleiner Geschichtsschreiber, gegen die allmächtige, allgegenwärtige Armee" (p.11), and he comforts himself with the thought to which characters in Hein's later prose turn, namely, that it is better not to unlock doors which lead to difficult and painful memories: "Die Scheunentore zu öffnen, um nie wieder schlafen zu können, um sich vor sich selbst zu ekeln, auszuspeien? Nein, es widerspricht der Vernunft, Kenntnisse zu erlangen, zu erzwingen, die uns unerträglich sind" (p.12). As an early indication that such memories cannot be entirely suppressed, Racine had vomited bile upon seeing a pitchfork later in the trip.

Racine's unfulfilled love for the actress Marie de Champmeslé is a further source of anguish at a missed opportunity. He admits that, in his wife Catherine, he married a stranger whom he has never loved. This adds to the pain of the Dutch memories and combines to haunt him and cause the sickness which Marianne Krumrey has described as a "Synonym für die Vergewaltigung des eigenen Geistes".<sup>6</sup> In an interview in 1982, Hein expressed the view that confronting uncomfortable memories is a fundamental part of our human experience:

Es sind kleine Schritte, die er (und ich und Sie) gehen können, sie sind irgendwie auch lächerlich, aber sie dennoch zu gehen ist ein Ansatz in die Menschwerdung hinein, ein Ausgang aus der selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the dilemma of whether to face up to uncomfortable truths or not, commentators have identified further features of this story which recur in Hein's

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<sup>6</sup> Marianne Krumrey, 'Gegenwart im Spiegel der Geschichte. Christoph Hein: "Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois"', *Temperamente*, 4/1981, pp.143-147, here p.143.

<sup>7</sup> See Klaus Hammer, 'Gespräch mit Christoph Hein' in Horst Fassel and Klaus Hammer (eds), *Wissenschaftliche Beiträge der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena* (Jena, 1982). Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Öffentlich arbeiten* (Berlin and Weimar, 1987), pp.120-129, here p.124.

subsequent work. In an interview, Klaus Hammer highlighted Hein's use of subtext, whereby characters say one thing but the reader understands something else simultaneously implied. Hammer claimed that whilst this is widely acknowledged with regard to *Der fremde Freund* (where I will examine this feature of Hein's work in greater depth), it is also present in this collection.<sup>8</sup> In reply, Hein, demonstrating the influence of drama on his prose writing, spoke of his admiration for Chekhov's use of this technique:

Ein ganz großer Meister auch dieser Halbsätze, des fortlaufenden Untertextes ist Tschechow, auch der Dramatiker. Das ist ganz wunderbar, wie die Figuren etwas sagen, und der Zuschauer bemerkt, sie sagen gleichzeitig noch etwas anderes.

A further element which recurs in Hein's prose is a focus on academics and intellectuals. In this collection, this can be found not only in the first story about Racine, but also in the last one, 'Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert' (pp.93-164). The fictive letters which Johann Seifert sends to his wife from Russia, and which constitute this story, were apparently written in 1829. At this time, Seifert was travelling as valet to Alexander von Humboldt, who was on a mission to study the geology of Russia and Siberia. The letters are introduced by a foreword signed by Hein, playing the part of an editor acting on behalf of his publishers, who appears to add weight to their authenticity by setting out the details of their origins. Hein explains that the thirty-seven letters (twenty-three of which are published here) had been discovered in 1946 in the former archives of the Gestapo in Berlin and again thirty years later in Berlin's Tieckstraße. They

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, 'Dialog ist das Gegenteil von Belehren' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft. Christoph Hein. Ein Arbeitsbuch. Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie* (Berlin and Weimar, 1992), pp.11-50, here p.28.

are striking for their old-fashioned style and spelling conventions, which become apparent as early as the fourth sentence:

Briefgen schreiben ist eine höllische Arbeith, und wann ich die lezten Wochen einiges Lob hörte ueber meine Fortschritte, ich sehe, es misslingt mir wiederum. Allein nach dem Befinden der schönsten Mutter auf GOtthes Erde wollte ich mich erkundigen (p.97).

Such spelling conventions strengthen the sense of authenticity given to the letters in the foreword. There is however one source of information which definitively clarifies the uncertainty surrounding their origins: the postscript 'Typische Bemerkungen zu untypischen Texten' by Hein's lector, Günther Drommer. Drommer recalls how Hein's foreword to the letters, and, more importantly, his accuracy in recreating the language of the time had initially fooled him into believing them to be genuine. Further research had established, however, that whilst Johann Seifert was a real figure who did indeed travel to Russia with Alexander von Humboldt, virtually nothing remained of his letters. Nonetheless, Hein had evidently been successful in creating a sense of authenticity in writing according to the conventions of nineteenth-century German.

It is obvious from its title that 'Der neuere (glücklichere) Kohlhaas. Bericht über einen Rechtshandel aus den Jahren 1972/73' (pp.73-92) is a text set in the twentieth century. But the word 'neuere' suggests a link to a predecessor. The historical figure in question here is a literary one as this is a modern-day adaptation of Heinrich von Kleist's famous story *Michael Kohlhaas* (1810). As in the story by Kleist, the protagonist (this time, an accountant named Hubert K.) is determined to defend his rights and the principle of justice. He claims to have

been cheated out of forty Marks by his employers in an incident involving sick pay. Hubert becomes obsessed with proving his point, to the detriment of his family relationships. By the end of the story, victory in the case has cost him his wife, who has been driven away by his obstinacy.

This dogmatic attitude is one which Hein especially associates with Prussia. Whereas it is Humboldt who criticises the Prussians in the Seifert story, Hein himself has said of them, in connection with the Kohlhaas story, that their attitude is one where “die Gerechtigkeit möge siegen, mag auch die Welt darüber zugrunde gehen”.<sup>9</sup> The Kohlhaas story has a further personal angle for Hein. In 1533, a court case involving the farmer and tradesman Michael Kohlhaase, on whom Kleist based his story, took place in the castle of Bad Döben, the town where Hein spent his childhood.<sup>10</sup> As we shall see later in this thesis, Hein is not averse to using details from his childhood in his prose. More specifically, the history of Burg Döben recurs as an influence in *Horns Ende* and *Das Napoleon-Spiel*.

The Kohlhaas story, like the Racine text, employs a third-person narrative voice, which provides a very traditional introduction to setting and character:

Die Szene ist H., eine Stadt im Thüringischen, gelegen an der oberen Werra, Kreisstadt des Verwaltungsbezirks Suhl. Hubert K., Buchhalter in der volkseigenen Stuhlfabrik der Stadt, verheiratet und Vater eines Sohnes, galt bei seinen Nachbarn und Kollegen als das Muster eines *Rechnungsführers* (p.73).

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Irmtraud Gutschke, ‘Ich bin ein Schreiber von Chroniken’, *Neues Deutschland*, 2/3 December 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* (Berlin and Weimar, 1990), pp.201-207, here p.204.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Funk, *Bad Döben Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Bad Döben, 1990), p.17.

The story by Kleist begins:

An den Ufern der Havel lebte, um die Mitte des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts, ein Roßhändler, namens *Michael Kohlhaas*, Sohn eines Schulmeisters, einer der rechtschaffensten zugleich und entsetzlichsten Menschen seiner Zeit. – Dieser außerordentliche Mann würde, bis in sein dreißigstes Jahr, für das Muster eines guten Staatsbürgers haben gelten können.<sup>11</sup>

The narrator of Hein's story goes on to refer to the protagonist as "unser Held" from the traditional stance of an auctorial narrator, who, as Franz Stanzel has put it, takes on the role of a chronicler seeking to establish historical truth as an objective editor.<sup>12</sup> The language reveals similarities to Kleist's: there are parallels, in the penultimate paragraph, for instance, to Kleist's 'Schachtelsatz' style of long sentences consisting of many sub-clauses as found in the original *Michael Kohlhaas* story:

Hubert K., dem verschiedene Kollegen im Anschluß an die Verhandlung beschämt, aber um so herzlicher gratulierten, feierte an dem Abend dieses für ihn so denkwürdigen und freudigen Tages allein in der verlassenen Wohnung seinen schließlich erfolgreichen Kampf, in dem er, so rasch ermüdet nach ersten Versuchen, sich in der Welt sein Recht zu verschaffen, auf die außerordentlichste Weise von dieser Welt darin unterstützt wurde (p.91).

In terms of the style of these stories then, Hein's reveals influences which date back to long before the modernist movement. The Racine text is narrated in the

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<sup>11</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, *Werke und Briefe* (Berlin and Weimar, 1978), p.7.

<sup>12</sup> Franz K. Stanzel, *Typische Formen des Romans* (Göttingen, 1964), p.18.

third person, and, despite the protagonist recounting memories in the past, depicts a very transparent progression of time in the present from “Ein Geräusch im Haus weckt ihn” (p.5) to “Er ist angekommen” (p.24), which gives the story a clear sense of a beginning and an end. Seifert’s letters, obviously ‘narrated’ in the first person, give the impression of Hein trying things out and testing himself by writing to the discipline of old-fashioned language. ‘Der neuere (glücklichere) Kohlhaas’ is also written to a particular style, and not only Kleist’s: in her review, Christa Schuenke stated that Hein’s ability to master “Buchhalterdeutsch” had made her cry with laughter.<sup>13</sup>

In writing a contemporary adaptation of an older story, Hein bridges the gap between the past and present. Yet the way in which he portrays the relationship between the past and the present, not only in this story, provoked considerable debate. Marianne Krumrey was critical of Hein in this respect. Firstly, referring to ‘Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois’, she claimed that Hein’s version of the past is not entirely accurate:

Er [Hein] benutzt diese Figur [Racine], um seine Thesen von der Verderblichkeit und Unmoral des käuflichen Geistes zu illustrieren. Das ist selbstverständlich eine legitime literarische Methode. Trotzdem muß man fragen, inwiefern sie der historischen Wahrheit nahe kommt. Und da habe ich Zweifel.

She goes on to offer an alternative view of the reason for Racine’s tragedy, before expanding her criticism:

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<sup>13</sup> Christa Schuenke, ‘Zu Christoph Heins “Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois”’, *Forum* 5/1981, p.15.

Hein wird doch nicht entgangen sein, daß die von ihm gewählten geschichtlichen Konstellationen von Intellektuellen und einer Diktaturform des Adels mit dem heutigen Verhältnis von Intelligenz und herrschender Arbeiterklasse wenig zu tun haben.

In this criticism, she is querying the relevance of the past to the present in the examples which Hein has chosen. But at the core of her criticism is Hein's use of the past per se.

Hein macht unter dem Deckmantel der Geschichte Widersprüche öffentlich, die er sich offenbar auf andere Weise nicht auszusprechen imstande fühlt. [...] Diese Methode [erzielt] beim Rezipienten höchstens 'eine Andeutung, eine ironische Bemerkung, ein verzweifelter Lachen' [...], was leider eine verbreitete, aber nicht desto trotz äußerst verkrüppelte Form der Kommunikation ist. Die große Chance der Literatur, echte Verständigung zu stiften, ein besseres Zurechtfinden im Leben, ein tieferes Verständnis der Zeit zu erreichen [...] wird damit verschenkt.<sup>14</sup>

Hein's lector, Günther Drommer, defended him against the allegations found in the first two criticisms by Krumrey by making the valid point that it is not the historical authenticity (e.g. of Seifert's letters) which is fundamental to the stories' value, since Hein's product is a literary, not a historical, one: "Freilich, der [Hein] ist kein Historiograph, sondern allein Schriftsteller, Benutzer von historischer Wahrheit als Zwischenprodukt, um mit deren Hilfe literarische Wahrheit zu schaffen" (p.167 in the original edition). Hein uses the past as a source of inspiration for his literary product, but he is also allowing himself the freedom to play with it. Indeed, defending the right not to have to work within the parameters of historical 'fact' is a recurrent feature of Hein's work. As for

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<sup>14</sup> Marianne Krumrey, 'Gegenwart im Spiegel der Geschichte', *Temperamente*, 4/1981, pp.143-145.



the final criticism, Krumrey would evidently prefer Hein either to focus purely on the present or to be more direct about the relevance of a historical precedent to the present. She seems to be suggesting that a more explicit use of historical precedent could provide a basis from which people could make a moral judgement on how they should lead their lives today. Such ideas about literature's opportunity to "create real understanding" go to the heart of much of the subsequent criticism levelled at Hein throughout his career as, for many commentators, he is not explicit enough in what he is 'saying' in his work.

Not all GDR commentators shared Krumrey's standpoint. Christoph Funke disagreed with her view that Hein is somehow abdicating responsibility in his stories and explains:

Das Dokument, das überlieferte Bild der historischen Person, die wissenschaftlich erhärtete Tatsache sind für Hein Voraussetzung souveräner erzählerischer Gebilde, die sich platter Eindeutigkeit entziehen. Meiner Meinung nach will sich der Autor nicht aus der Verantwortung herausmogeln, aber auch das Überreden und Dozieren liegt ihm nicht, die einfache Nutzenanwendung umgeht er mit virtuosem Geschick und einem spürbar ironischen Spott.<sup>15</sup>

This argument was echoed in the West German press by Uwe Wittstock:

Er [Hein] beschreibt nicht anhand unserer Gegenwart, zeigt keineswegs, inwieweit das Gestern und das Heute miteinander verstrickt sind, sondern begnügt sich damit, in pittoresker Umgebung einige recht allgemein

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<sup>15</sup> Christoph Funke, 'Spiel mit Geschichte', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 10/1981, pp.149-152, here p.149.

formulierte - und vielleicht nur deshalb zeitlose - Weisheiten vorzutragen.<sup>16</sup>

In these 'historical' stories, Hein does not feel obliged to offer a clear moral interpretation. He does not overtly comment on the relationship between the working and intellectual classes in 'Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert'. Nor does he judge his characters. He does not condemn Racine for not confronting awkward issues in his life, even though his own comments, as we have seen in his interview with Klaus Hammer published in *Öffentlich arbeiten*, indicate that he considers this necessary. Hein does not want to provide easy answers or moral guidelines for his readers. To use his own words: "Meine Geschichten sind keine moralischen Appelle".<sup>17</sup> It may be possible to make a moral interpretation of them (that Racine is a coward, that Hubert is a fool, for instance), but the narrators do not spell this out. Krumrey is right in claiming that Hein does not offer a clear message for the present day in these historical texts. Yet it would appear that he did not intend to provide such a message. Indeed, it is dubious whether a more direct, moralistic approach would help to create the "genuine understanding" which Krumrey says she desires.

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY TEXTS

If the pre-twentieth-century texts throw up the question of the relationship between the past and the present, the more contemporary stories raise the question of what actually constitutes history. These stories reveal the interaction between 'big' and 'small' history - 'big' being major political and social developments in different eras of German history, and 'small' the events in

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<sup>16</sup> Uwe Wittstock, 'Michael Kohlhaas als Buchhalter', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 October 1982.

<sup>17</sup> See Klaus Hammer, 'Gespräch mit Christoph Hein' in Christoph Hein, *Öffentlich arbeiten*, p.124.

characters' lives, such as love affairs, marriages and deaths. At the heart of the collection are the stories grouped under the title 'Aus: Ein Album Berliner Stadtansichten'. These seven snapshots of life in Berlin over the previous one hundred years, with very specific contexts in terms of time and place, put a human face on the historical experience of living in Berlin in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Major events such as world wars are seen through the narrow perspective of one family, or even an individual, rather than as epic landmarks of the century affecting a large cast of characters. Hein hinted at the importance he attaches to a personal focus in an essay published shortly after the 'Wende' entitled 'A world turning point' in which he wrote: "Es ist nicht der Mantel der Geschichte, der mich berührt und mein Schreiben bestimmt und verändert, es ist das Hemd der Geliebten".<sup>18</sup>

This feature of Hein's work was clearly not just triggered by the 'Wende'. As early as 1982, in his interview with Klaus Hammer, Hein had asked:

Wie weit ist die Geschichte heute für uns noch erreichbar, wahrnehmbar? Das Schlachtfeld oder das Parlament bringen nicht mehr den Punkt der Geschichte, das sind nur die Ergebnisse, die Folgerungen, die Geschichte im Salon ergeben haben. Jedes Ereignis zeigt sich uns nur noch als Spitze eines Eisberges: Hinter den offenliegenden Tatsachen steckt ein sich verborgen haltendes Netz von Ursachen und Interessen.<sup>19</sup>

Hammer cites an example from Hein's drama, arguing that, even when dealing with the figure of Oliver Cromwell, Hein does not concentrate on the moments of conflict, but on the "Ruhepausen der Revolution". Likewise, the collection of

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<sup>18</sup> Christoph Hein, 'A world turning point' in Frauke Meyer-Gosau (ed.), *Christoph Hein* [Text & Kritik 111] (Munich, 1991), pp.3-5, here p.5.

<sup>19</sup> See Klaus Hammer, 'Gespräch mit Christoph Hein' in Christoph Hein, *Öffentlich arbeiten*, p.128.

episodes from everyday life in the 'Berlin album' helps to create a more complete chronicle of life in twentieth-century Germany.

'Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen' (pp.44-51) is one example of the stories which set their focus on personal history. Although it recounts an escape attempt under the Berlin Wall, this element of the story is relegated to the background details of the plot, unlike sensationalist films and books which emphasise nerve-racking digging and crawling, or desperate schemes to get over to 'the other side'. Instead, the narrative is dominated by the secret love of the narrator's friend, Max, for a woman he is helping to escape. This feature of the plot creates at least as much tension as the escape itself. The story is narrated in the first person by a sixteen-year-old boy. In an effort to impress Max, who is eight years older, he mimics his monosyllabic conversation style and does his best to imitate his aloof manner.

Später wollte der Lehrer von Max und mir wissen, wie wir die Chancen einschätzten, die Grenze durch die Kanalisation zu überschreiten. Max sagte ihm, daß wir beide dazu keine Meinung hätten. Der Lehrer, eingeschüchtert, bemühte sich, ein Gespräch zustande zu bringen. Er fragte nach unseren Berufen, nach der Situation in Berlin. Max antwortete einsilbig, und ich tat's ihm nach (p.47).

They both smoke cigarettes and refuse an offer of chocolate, presumably in an attempt to appear more grown up (p.48).

This is the first of many instances in his career when Hein writes from the perspective of an adolescent boy. He returns to it in *Horns Ende*, where Thomas (twelve years old) is one of five narrators, and again in *Von allem Anfang an*,

where Daniel (thirteen years old) is the sole narrator. Whilst these two characters are three or four years younger than the narrator of 'Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen', much of their confusion, worry and ambition is the same, such as the desire to impress an older friend.

The theme of moving from East to West re-emerges in 'Charlottenburger Chaussee, 11. August' (pp.42-44). This story is set in 1951, almost exactly ten years before the Berlin Wall was erected, when free movement between East and West Berlin was still possible. The identity of the narrator remains unclear here as s/he recounts a story told to her/him by a philosophy lecturer from the Humboldt University (possibly a playful link back to the Seifert text). In this story, a group of students go through the Brandenburg Gate to call upon West Berlin's youth to participate in the closing ceremony of the 'Weltfestspiele'. In Charlottenburger Chaussee, they are stopped by a young policeman who, after telling them to return to the "Russian sector" and commenting that they should be ashamed to wear the blue Russian smock, snatches at the blouse of one of the students, Karla, a favourite among the male students. A fight ensues before the East Berlin students run back to their university. Although, once again, we see an instance of a woman distracting the attention of young men, in this case from either side of the Wall, the style is more anecdotal and less intense than 'Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen'.

The tragedy of the Nazi regime is reflected through a narrow focus in 'Die Familiengruft' (pp.38-42) in the fate suffered by the narrator's uncle Eugen, a Jewish actor. Eugen had tried to hide himself and his family in a tomb at the Weißensee cemetery, only for them to be reported to the Gestapo. In order to

avoid repeated humiliations at the hands of drunken policemen, Eugen poisoned himself and all his family, leaving behind in their tomb the scripts of the “kokette, nichtssagende Stücke” (p.41) in which he had performed. The third-person narration of the nephew or niece of the uncle is matter-of-fact about the family’s death. S/he carefully tries to piece together the facts from a letter, the few remaining photos and memories of family and friends. But the narrator is not omniscient and can only guess at the reasons behind the mysteries of the story: “Den Aussagen von Bekannten, Nachbarn und Gemeindemitgliedern zufolge ist anzunehmen, daß [...]” (p.40), “ungeklärt bleibt” (p.40), “unbeantwortbar bleibt” (p.41). It is recounted calmly, with no condemnation in emotional language of the secret police officers who had abused the family:

Auch zwangen sie den Onkel, Lieder aus Operetten vorzutragen und zu tanzen; sie trieben, wie es im Brief heißt, mit der Familie die unwürdigsten Dinge und vergnügten sich an ihrem Unglück. Den Brief schrieb der Onkel am 21. Juni, einen Tag bevor er den angekündigten dritten Besuch der Polizeibeamten erwarten mußte. An diesem Tag vergiftete er seine Frau, seine drei Kinder und sich selbst (p.41).

The narrator’s theory to explain why the uncle had taken his scripts with him into the tomb was that in his darkest hours, this man had leaned on the memory of some of his finest moments in order to salvage some personal dignity. This desire to maintain his dignity and assert individual autonomy against the background of ‘big’ history is present in virtually all of these stories. The calm narrative voice reveals a further element of the influence of writers such as Kleist. In his interview with Klaus Hammer, Hein explained how much he admired Kleist and Johann Peter Hebel for their “ruhige, welterfahrene Haltung”

and the way in which they “das Ungeheuerlichste ohne Hysterie aufzeigen”.<sup>20</sup> In another interview, he praised these authors for having been very precise chroniclers.<sup>21</sup> Their influence clearly goes beyond providing the basis for an adaptation of a historical story.

In the three stories described so far, the action has centred upon incidents which shed new light on the ‘big’ history of the time. Yet the ‘Berlin album’ stories also reveal the continuity which underpins the many different eras (Empire, Weimar Republic, Third Reich, FRG/GDR) which fragmented German history in the one hundred years prior to their publication. One technique which Hein uses to convey the continuity across different eras is writing novels in “Stichpunkten”<sup>22</sup> through a distanced narrator, who, in contrast to the three stories in the ‘Berliner Stadtansichten’ mentioned so far, is not one of the characters featured in the story. An example of this is ‘Friederike, Martha, Hilde’ (pp.25-36), where the lives of three generations of women from one family living in nineteenth and twentieth-century Berlin are chronicled. We are shown the development of the family over several eras of German history. The eldest of the characters, Friederike, is born in 1859 and the youngest, Hilde, dies around 1976. The broad overview of their lives reveals the fickle nature of memory within families, where parts of individuals’ heritage are conveniently emphasised or forgotten for the sake of contemporary advancement, an example being Friederike’s and Hilde’s anti-Semitism, which ignores the fact that Friederike’s first husband, Hilde’s grandfather, was a Jew.

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.126.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Irmtraud Gutschke, ‘Ich bin ein Schreiber von Chroniken’ in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.203.

<sup>22</sup> This term was referred to by Günther Drommer in his afterword to the original edition, p.169.

'Friederike, Martha, Hilde' is told in a documentary style with long sentences which recount lots of facts:

Nach fünfzehnjähriger Ehe wurde Friederike, die ein wenige Monate dauerndes Verhältnis mit einem langaufgeschossenen, verwickelten Primaner, Sohn eines Bankiers und Warenhausbesitzers, eingegangen war, schwanger und gebar zur Jahreswende 1891 ein Mädchen, welches ihr Mann, der um das Verhältnis seiner Frau und die tatsächliche Vaterschaft wußte, auf den Namen Martha taufen ließ und mit großer Aufmerksamkeit und Freude umsorgte (p.26).

Almost every paragraph announces a new, major event in the characters' lives. We are told within the same sentence of Friederike's marriage to a tram driver and his subsequent death seven years later (p.28). Wider historical details, such as the growth of Berlin as the German capital ("Das als Hauptstadt des Deutschen Reiches aufblühende Berlin brachte auch der Posamenterie des Ehemannes wirtschaftliche Erfolge", p.26) and information about the sorts of skills women were expected to have in the Third Reich (such as cooking and sewing, p.32), are also mentioned, but, as the example above shows, this generally only occurs when it is of relevance to the 'small' history of the characters' lives. Dignity and pride recur as themes. Martha's death is directly attributable to her husband's refusal to let a doctor examine her body. Her mother Friederike loses contact with her neighbours because poverty has struck her, and her house is not as beautiful as it once was. It is only her pride which prevents her from selling the house.

Like 'Friederike, Martha, Hilde', 'Die Witwe eines Maurers' (pp.36-38) also tells of a Berlin woman whose dignity prevents her from leaving her home.



Following the death of her husband in riots shortly after the First World War, the widow in question is granted a state pension by the authorities of the Weimar Republic, which is maintained both by the Nazi regime and the SED. The fact that each administration accepts the precedent set by the previous one reveals a surprising degree of continuity behind them and suggests that, in many ways, the lives of ordinary citizens did not change dramatically when a new system was established. The widow is embarrassed about receiving the money from the three different regimes and about appearing to ask for help, worried that she is getting something she does not deserve, which could make her the subject of gossip amongst her neighbours. Her fears prove to be well founded as we are told that those who knew her regarded her as “bedauernswert”, but also as “schamlos” (p.36). As in ‘Friederike, Martha, Hilde’, the focus is again on women as the men folk come and go to and from war. It too is recounted in a detached, cool, third-person narrative voice devoid of pathos:

Diese Frau heiratete im Jahre 1918 einen aus dem Krieg zurückkommenden Maurer, der ein halbes Jahr später in den Berliner Märzkämpfen erschossen wurde. Er hinterließ seiner Frau ein noch ungeborenes Kind und das Mitgliedsbuch der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (p.36 – we are told nothing more about the fate of the unborn child).

In contrast to the robust women in ‘Friederike, Martha, Hilde’, however, this widow, despite her attempts to live her life regardless of political developments, is dominated and intimidated by ‘big’ history. She refuses to talk about her life and dies a lonely death.

The structure of 'Friederike, Martha, Hilde' is repeated in 'Frank, eine Kindheit mit Vätern' (pp.52-54), which recounts the lives of four generations of one family. Here the focus is on men rather than women, and the number of generations dealt with increases by one. Across the generations, this family proves to be non-academically orientated, but each in turns sets academic success as the prime objective for its children. In the end, Frank commits suicide as he is made to feel a personal failure due to his lack of achievements at school. Again it is a third-person narrator who provides an overview of the continuity evident within one family:

Im Sommer des folgenden Jahres sprang Frank ein zweites Mal aus dem Fenster. Er hatte sich, da er den Gesprächen der Eltern entnahm, daß ihn bei dem ersten Sprung das Gesträuch und der weiche Mutterboden vor dem Schlimmsten bewahrt habe, einen betonierte Gehweg als Ort des Aufpralls ausgesucht. Der Sprung war tödlich. Einen Abschiedsbrief schrieb er nicht. Er war zehn Jahre alt, als er starb (p.54).

The theme of unacknowledged continuity across generations is maintained in 'Der Sohn' (pp.55-62). In his childhood, Pawel is desperately keen to support Communism in the GDR in order to impress his father. In his teenage years, however, he rebels against him. After two failed attempts at fleeing the Republic, the son settles for a comfortable life, knowing he will benefit from the privileges associated with having an influential father in the Party.

These stories hardly present GDR society in a glorious light. It is misguided to think then that Hein shies away from problems in contemporary society by writing under the cover of the past. In his collection of 'Berliner Stadtansichten', Hein fleshes out the bones of German history with his anecdotes and family

stories about marriages and affairs, but he also reveals the continuity behind the dates and eras as people adapt to the dramatically changing political and social context. This form of chronicling denies assumptions of progress, which were so important to the GDR, as mistakes are repeated across the generations, including within the GDR itself. As Graham Jackman has said, the 'Berliner Stadtansichten' can be seen as a "corrective to the GDR's teleological view of history".<sup>23</sup>

The endings of several of these stories reflect the fact that Hein is not seeking to provide a lesson or to bring the story to a clear conclusion. Neither 'Charlottenburger Chaussee, 11. August' nor 'Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen' clarify all the questions which they raise. Whilst the philosopher in the former tries to explain the 'moral' of 'Charlottenburger Chaussee, 11. August', at the end of both stories the characters seem to be confused as to what has happened around them. 'Frank, eine Kindheit mit Vätern' closes with a sentence which does not have a direct relevance to the rest of the story and which leaves readers with the feeling that there are unresolved issues: "Frank wollte seinen Eltern die Enttäuschung ersparen und sprang aus dem Flurfenster eines fünften Stockwerks. An jenem Tag war der Himmel über Berlin wolkenlos, es war der heißeste Tag des Monats Juni" (p.54).

The one remaining story from the *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* collection is 'Leb wohl, mein Freund, es ist schwer zu sterben' (pp.63-72). This story shows Hein at his best in offering an insight into the emotions of embarrassment and hurt. The structure is circular as it starts and ends with its focus on a train ticket

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<sup>23</sup> Graham Jackman, "Unverhofftes Wiedersehen": Narrative paradigms in Christoph Hein's "Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen" and "Exekution eines Kalbes", *German Life and Letters*, 3/1998, pp.398-414, here p.398.

inspector. We encounter a lady who has obviously prepared meticulously for a trip to visit an old friend. When she arrives, she discovers that he is now married and has a child. Her attempts to conceal her disappointment end in humiliation. This short story provides an early indication of Hein's interest in exploring the innermost feelings of a female character, something which is examined in greater depth through a first-person perspective in his next piece of prose, *Der fremde Freund*. The atmosphere is close and oppressive and firmly concentrated on one particular moment, rather than the distanced approach apparent in the stories which cover a broad timespan:

Die Frau hatte für die Fahrt ihre Kostümjacke nicht ablegen wollen. Sie saß schwer atmend auf dem Sitz. Ihre Finger zerknitterten ein Taschentuch, mit dem sie sich immer häufiger die Stirn abtrocknete. Die Falten ihres Rockes waren jetzt nicht mehr wegzustreichen, Stoffwülste über dem Schoß, die ihren nervösen Fingern widerstanden (p.64).

Along with 'Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen', 'Leb wohl, mein Freund, es ist schwer zu sterben' is the only story in the collection which contains dialogue. The fact that dialogue is so rare in this collection indicates that the characters are not given a great deal of freedom to express themselves (and do not find it easy to articulate their feelings) and that the narrator generally keeps a tight rein on the action. This is even true of the two texts which do contain dialogue, for the exchanges between the characters are generally brief, both in terms of the number of exchanges and the amount which they speak in each exchange:

"Sie haben auch studiert?" fragte Karin plötzlich.

Die Frau des Arztes nickte, sie sei Lehrerin, genauer, sie sei Lehrerin gewesen. Der Haushalt, das Kind und ein schwieriger Mann beschäftigten sie vollauf. Dabei lächelte sie den Arzt an.

“Und wie geht es dir?” fragte er.

“Gut”, erwiderte sie, “ich habe viel Arbeit.”

“Aber Sie essen gar nichts”, warf die Frau ein.

Sie habe bereits in der Stadt gegessen, sie wolle auf der Durchreise nur mal vorbeigekommen sein, um guten Tag zu sagen.

Die Eltern mußten sich nun um das Kind kümmern, das, durch die Anwesenheit des Gastes abgelenkt, bisher nur mit großen Augen die Frau betrachtet und kaum einen Löffel gegessen hatte (p.68).

The dialogue reveals problems in communication rather than a process of creating greater understanding between the characters. It is not long before indirect speech replaces direct conversation, which is in turn superseded by the narrator's voice. At this early stage in his career, Hein, in addition to highlighting problems of communication, seems reluctant to let characters express themselves freely.

## RECEPTION AND CONCLUSION

The reception of Hein's first prose collection was generally encouraging. In the FRG, Klaus Linsel considered the short stories to be “erstaunlich gut gelungen”<sup>24</sup> and Konrad Franke wrote that “die Proben versprechen viel”.<sup>25</sup> In the GDR, Christoph Funke viewed Hein as a challenge, an author who provided intellectual stimulation. He described Hein as offering an invitation to the co-player (critical reader) to join in a game,<sup>26</sup> something which becomes an important theme in Hein's later prose. Hein is not aware of there having been any official opposition to the collection in the GDR. He believes that the view was expressed that he was a difficult writer, which may have meant that he was

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<sup>24</sup> Klaus Linsel, ‘Vollendet ausgedachte Wirklichkeiten’, *Die Tat*, 22 January 1982.

<sup>25</sup> Konrad Franke, ‘Spiegelungen’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 6 October 1982.

<sup>26</sup> Christoph Funke, ‘Spiel mit Geschichte’, *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 10/1981, p.152.

not regarded as particularly threatening by cultural politicians.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, SED officials soon noted Hein's intellectual prowess. In her 1981 report for the 'Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel', cultural politician Meta Borst wrote:

Hein hat sich in den Autorenkreis des Aufbau-Verlages eingefügt. Sein überaus hoher Bildungsgrad und ein gewisses intellektuelles Herangehen an Fragen der Kunst und Literatur haben ihm allerdings [...] den Zugang und die Verständigung mit den übrigen Debütanten des Aufbau-Verlages erschwert. Er ist ein ausgezeichneter Brecht-Kenner und hat mit seiner historischen Bildung und Kenntnis über das realistische Theater einige der jüngeren Autoren 'verblüfft'.<sup>28</sup>

Hein clearly enjoyed the support of the GDR's 'Akademie der Künste', for he was awarded its prestigious Heinrich Mann prize<sup>29</sup> for this collection of prose and for his plays the following year.

Despite the criticisms which Marianne Krumrey made of Hein in her article for *Temperamente* in 1981, she subsequently included him in her list of promising writers of short stories from the young generation of GDR authors. 'Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen' is the story she selects from the collection, along with various works by other young writers, as being "äußerst gelungene[r] Kurzgeschichten von hoher literarischer Qualität".<sup>30</sup> This article also reveals the

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<sup>27</sup> Hein told me this at a meeting in Berlin in March 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Bundesarchiv file DR1 2121a.

<sup>29</sup> Emmerich classes it as one of the four leading prizes out of the fifty available in the GDR. See Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), p.45.

<sup>30</sup> Marianne Krumrey, 'Beachtliche Kurzgeschichten junger Autoren', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 2/1983, pp.305-309. She also mentions the authors Martin Stephan, Bernd Wagner, Maria Seidemann, Beate Morgenstern and Christa Müller.

general unease which the GDR's cultural policy-makers felt towards young writers in general, most of whom are perceived as being too formalistic:<sup>31</sup>

Diese Kurzgeschichten ragen aus dem breiten Angebot junger Prosa schon deshalb heraus, weil in ihnen die Formengesetzmäßigkeiten des literarischen Genres der klassischen Kurzgeschichte angeeignet und handwerklich beherrscht sind. Gerade in der Aneignung dieser Tradition der sozialistischen Literatur unterscheiden sie sich von einem dilettantischen, voraussetzungslosen, vorgeprägte literarische Formen negierenden Schreiben, das man leider viel zu oft bei jungen Autoren findet. Aber die hier genannten Kurzgeschichten bestechen nicht nur formal, sie sind alle mit wertvollen und wichtigen Ideengehalten verbunden. In ihnen findet man eine gelungene Vereinigung von Inhalt und Form (p.306).

Krumrey's remarks contain some truth. Features of traditional short stories are indeed present in this collection, and writers such as Kleist and Hebel influence the tone of the narrative voices. Many of the stories are tightly controlled by an external third-person narrator who recounts a clear development from a beginning to an end point ('Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois', 'Der neuere (glücklichere) Kohlhaas', 'Die Witwe eines Maurers', 'Friederike, Matha, Hilde'). But Hein does not adopt a moralistic tone or provide easy answers for his readers by, for example, condemning his characters (such as Hubert K. or Racine) for their shortcomings. The endings of the stories often highlight confusion or uncertainty, rather than providing a clear interpretation or sense of conclusion, especially those in which the narrator is one of the characters in the stories ('Charlottenburger Chaussee, 11. August'). Krumrey may criticise Hein for only hinting at things in his stories, but, as I have argued, it is unlikely that

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<sup>31</sup> She does not mention any names here.

Hein wanted to achieve more than this. His view of how literature can help to establish understanding is evidently different to hers.

At the heart of the difference of views lie diverging ideas about how history should be interpreted in the present. This collection certainly confirms Hein's interest in history. Real, historical figures feature, and the theme of continuity across different eras is at the core of many of the stories. Hein seeks to offer a broad view of what constitutes history, with a focus on individual lives and destinies rather than major events and a large cast of characters. He reserves the right to use the past as a basis for a fictive account ('Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert'), but this does not mean that he is using it as a benchmark for 'the moral of the story', nor is it simply a way of avoiding 'truths' in the present. It could certainly be argued that non-dogmatic literature, narrated through a calm voice, which does not ignore the lives of individuals in their broader historical context, is more likely to create a deeper sense of understanding of the world among readers than a more pedantic approach.

*Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* shows Hein trying out a range of narrative techniques, not only in terms of the historical settings of the stories. He writes to the discipline of particular styles in 'Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert' and in the adaptation of the Kohlhaas story. The protagonists encompass males ('Der neuere (glücklichere) Kohlhaas', 'Die russischen Briefe') and females ('Friederike, Martha, Hilde', 'Leb wohl, mein Freund'), the young ('Frank, eine Kindheit mit Vätern', 'Der Sohn') and the old ('Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois', 'Die Witwe eines Maurers'). The timespan covered in the stories stretches from one day ('Charlottenburger Chaussee', 'Leb wohl, mein



Freund') to several generations ('Friederike, Martha, Hilde', 'Frank, eine Kindheit mit Vätern'). The 'Berliner Stadtansichten' alone contain a rich mix of narrative voices in the first and third person. As we will see later in this thesis, these experiments in style and themes stood Hein in good stead for the longer prose challenges to come.

## CHAPTER 2

“Wir müssen immer wieder in die Flammen gehen”.  
The distant protagonist and the responsibility of the  
reader in *Der fremde Freund*<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Hein's first piece of longer prose, the novella *Der fremde Freund*, underlined his status as one of the most promising authors in the GDR. It is narrated by Claudia, a forty-year-old doctor, who tells the story of her year-long relationship with Henry, an architect, who lives in the same apartment block as her. Their relationship is marked by separations and reunions before being brought to a definitive end when Henry is killed in a pub fight.

The fact that Hein chose to write this story from a female rather than a male perspective has been the subject of much interest. Hein has explained that he originally planned the story of a man (Henry), but lost interest in the project before re-writing it from a female perspective.<sup>2</sup> This change of perspective made the project more exciting for him as it presented a greater narrative challenge to

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Hein, *Der fremde Freund* (Berlin and Weimar, 1982). Page references in the text are to the 1994 Aufbau Taschenbuch edition.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, 'Dialog ist das Gegenteil von Belehren' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft. Christoph Hein. Ein Arbeitsbuch. Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie* (Berlin and Weimar, 1992), pp.11-50, here p.30.

penetrate the thoughts and feelings of a woman. Some commentators have argued that the narrator's gender is crucial,<sup>3</sup> interpreting the dream and rape scenes as being symbolic of male dominance. Others have used the text to highlight the problems of a patriarchal society.<sup>4</sup> I do not intend to address the gender issue in depth, but would simply state that the text also provides an excellent insight into the way in which men behave. The narrative constellation of *Der fremde Freund* makes it a highly perceptive text in its observations of the way in which men act towards their partners and each other. In this sense, writing from Claudia's standpoint allows Hein further critical distance to write about his original project.

*Der fremde Freund* also attracted a great deal of attention due to the distinctive voice of the narrator, who often speaks in an abrupt, cold tone. This chapter will study Claudia as the first-person narrator of the text, her language and approach to the twelve-month period she recounts in this story. The relationships between Hein and his narrator and between Claudia and her readers, are central to an understanding of Hein's narrative approach at this still early stage in his career and to the debate *Der fremde Freund* provoked in the GDR and beyond.

## PUBLICATION HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL REACTION

*Der fremde Freund* was published in the GDR by Aufbau Verlag in 1982 and, having appeared as a serial in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in the Federal Republic one year later. In West Germany, it was given the title *Drachenblut*, a reference to the mythical figure Siegfried from the 'Nibelungen' saga, who

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<sup>3</sup> Julia Hell, 'Christoph Hein's "Der fremde Freund/Drachenblut" and the antinomies of writing under "real existing socialism"' in Bernd Kratz (ed.), *Colloquia Germanica*, 3-4/1992, pp.307-337.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Arndt Krödel, 'Dickes Fell für den Gefühlswinter', *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*, 21 February 1984.

armours his body by bathing in dragon's blood but unwittingly leaves a small area unprotected, which Claudia uses to describe her relationship to the world. This change of title was forced on the West German publishers (Luchterhand) because a book (a travel guide to the USA) had already appeared in the FRG under the original title. Hein agreed to this change, but has stated that he prefers the original title as *Drachenblut*, in his view, misleads the reader into expecting a science fiction or fantasy story.<sup>5</sup>

Publication in the GDR was not entirely straightforward. Assessors for the Ministry of Culture gave it a mixed reception. Christa Schuenke found it a "sauber gearbeitet und nützliches Buch", and Klaus Hammer, whilst pointing out a few unnecessary repetitions in the text, recommended its publication. On the other hand, a report by Waltraut Mohnholz stated that "Heins Absicht, vor bestimmten Tendenzen in unserer gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung zu warnen geht so in die falsche Richtung". Mohnholz was shocked by the forms of alienation depicted among the characters and the negative portrayal of young people. Meta Borst, the cultural politician who, as we saw in the previous chapter on *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*, pointed out Hein's intellectual and cultural prowess, could not bring herself to recommend publication of *Der fremde Freund*. She found it too negative and suggested:

Es müßte wenigstens mit dem Verlag und über die Verlagsleitung versucht werden, einiges von dem 'negativen', das in einer solchen Fülle im Verlauf ds. Ms. zur Sprache kommt, zu bedenken und evtl. auf einige Aussagen zu verzichten.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See 'Volker Braun und Christoph Hein in der Diskussion' in Anna Chiarlioni, Gemma Sartori, Fabrizio Cambi (eds), *Die Literatur der DDR 1976-1986 - Akten der Internationalen Konferenz, Pisa, Mai 1987* (Pisa, 1988), pp.439-447, here p.444.

<sup>6</sup> For all of these comments see Bundesarchiv file DR1 2124.

As Borst suggests, criticisms were also made of particular formulations in the book. When the manuscript reached Dr. Klaus Selbig, head of department at the 'Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel', he dispatched the 'Druckgenehmigung' to Ruth Glatzer at Aufbau Verlag on 1 March 1982, but asked her to talk to Hein about certain aspects of the book and "recommend" a few changes. These included Hein's use of the word "Spitzel" on page 23 of the original manuscript (this corresponds to page 27 of the Aufbau paperback). Selbig was also unhappy with the lines on page 139 (paperback page 148) which described the prejudice against the brothers of Claudia's childhood friend Katharina, who comes from a religious family: "Der älteste Bruder [Paul] von Katharina wurde als Brigadier abgesetzt mit der Begründung, daß er in einer christlichen Jugendgruppe tätig war". Selbig explained to Glatzer: "Eine derartige Handhabung ist ungesetzlich, sie sollte vom Autor auch als solche charakterisiert werden, die Aussage bleibt im Ms. unkommentiert und ohne Standpunkt des Autors".

Two months later, on 28 April 1982, Meta Borst reported that Glatzer had met Hein, who had been very understanding and agreed to make changes to the manuscript. The word "Spitzel" was to be replaced with the comment: "daß ich anderen Leuten nicht nachspioniere" and Hein would distance himself from the justification for Paul's dismissal from the post of team leader ('Brigadier'): in its amended form, it would appear more arbitrary. Indeed, in the published version, these events are recounted through reported speech and the action taken is described as being "willkürlich" and "ohne jede rechtliche Grundlage". Borst wrote that the authorities' comments had thus been taken into consideration.

This episode is indicative of the kind of resistance Hein was to face from the censorship authorities throughout the 1980s, particularly with regard to *Horns Ende*.

*Der fremde Freund* quickly proved to be one of Aufbau Verlag's biggest successes in 1982.<sup>7</sup> Emmerich asserts that, in a short space of time, *Der fremde Freund* became one of the most read, most discussed books in and from the GDR, and justifiably so.<sup>8</sup> It ensured Hein's breakthrough not only within the GDR, but also beyond. A review in *El País*, for instance, claimed that it showed Hein to be one of the great contemporary European writers.<sup>9</sup> Hein says that he has received letters from people from all over the world telling him that they have had similar experiences to Claudia.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, much of the book's international success can be attributed to its depiction of alienation in modern, industrialised society, which can be related equally to the capitalist world. Rolf Michaelis asked simply: "Wann haben wir in den letzten Jahren eine so überzeugende Erzählung über die Entfremdung im Kapitalismus gelesen?"<sup>11</sup> It also received a significant and generally positive entry in the annual review of German literature published by Reclam Verlag in Stuttgart.<sup>12</sup>

Critics have taken quite different views of the relative importance of the political and artistic qualities of the novel. Dieter Sevin interpreted it as a political

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<sup>7</sup> See Bundesarchiv file DR1 6878 for the Aufbau report on 1982.

<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), p.306.

<sup>9</sup> Leopoldo Azancot, 'Vida sobre la superficie', *El País*, 1 May 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Transcript of an interview with Hein by Holly Aylett for a programme on culture in the GDR, entitled 'A Footnote in History?', shown on 'The South Bank Show', *ITV*, October 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Rolf Michaelis, 'Leben ohne zu leben', *Die Zeit*, 11 November 1983. Reprinted in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp.143-147, here p.144.

<sup>12</sup> Adolf Fink, 'Ein Lindenblatt der Verletzlichkeit', *Lesezeichen*, 7/1983, p.13. Reprinted in Reclam's annual review *Deutsche Literatur 1983. Jahresüberblick* (Stuttgart, 1984), pp.134-138.

allegory of the German-German situation. At the end of the book, Claudia explicitly describes her desire to re-establish her friendship with Katharina, who had followed her brothers to Lower Saxony as a result of also becoming a victim of prejudice in her schooling: "Ich will wieder mit Katharina befreundet sein. Ich möchte aus diesem dicken Fell meiner Ängste und meines Mißtrauens heraus. Ich will sie sehen. Ich will Katharina wiederhaben" (p.209). Sevin states: "Deutlicher kann das Verlangen nach dem Westen, sogar nach einem Zusammenschluß - sieht man in dieser Gestalt eine solche Repräsentation in der Figurenkonstellation - kaum ausgedrückt werden!"<sup>13</sup> Whilst such remarks may highlight the danger of reading too much political significance into a work of literature, Peter Renz, in addition to finding it too repetitive, was of the view that *Der fremde Freund* would not stand up to a purely literary inspection and felt that its impact was in fact dependent on the internal German-German situation:

Es täte, so meine ich, mancher Publikation eines DDR-Literaten gut, sie würde ebenso unvoreingenommen, ohne den künstlich aufgeladenen Hintergrund deutsch-deutscher Kulturempfindlichkeit, gelesen. Vielleicht käme wieder häufiger zur Sprache, worum es eigentlich geht, um literarische Qualität.<sup>14</sup>

In the UK, commentators differed in their views of the political nature of the text. Writing shortly after the collapse of the GDR and the appearance of the English-language translation (1989), Peter Graves argued that it "contains little of Hein's outspoken political criticism under the GDR's old regime".<sup>15</sup> Martin Kane, on the other hand, pointed out that the Association of German Critics had

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<sup>13</sup> Dieter Sevin, *Textstrategien in DDR-Prosawerken zwischen Bau und Durchbruch der Berliner Mauer* (Heidelberg, 1993), p.179.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Renz, 'Lesezeichen, Buchbesprechungen, Informationen, Interviews', *Süddeutscher Rundfunk*, 9 May 1984.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Graves, 'A shocking self-sufficiency', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 July 1990.

noted that *Der fremde Freund* forced a radical reappraisal of what was permitted a writer in the GDR.<sup>16</sup> The article by Carole Angier which appeared in the *New Statesman*<sup>17</sup> contained criticisms which echoed those made by some of the reviewers in the GDR. Angier did not believe that the human condition was as bad as it appears in this “dismal” book. In a sense, this is a refreshing comment as it means that, in addition to the positive resonance *Der fremde Freund* found outside Germany, it also provoked similar negative responses. This suggests that it is not entirely dependent on the socio-political context of divided Germany and that it can therefore be judged as a piece of literature.

#### LANGUAGE AND NARRATIVE STYLE AS A FORM OF DISTANCING

As Phillip McKnight has stated, *Der fremde Freund* returns to a key theme of *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*, namely, the ability to keep quiet about crimes as a prerequisite for living in society.<sup>18</sup> In *Der fremde Freund*, the crime in question is not one which the protagonist has witnessed, but one which the reader can see the protagonist inflicting on herself. Claudia shies away from emotional commitment throughout the story, and her tone is especially cool in the final chapter of the book when she describes how she has made herself invulnerable to the world:

Ich habe genügend von dem, was man Lebenserfahrung nennt. [...] Ich bin auf alles eingerichtet, ich bin gegen alles gewappnet, mich wird nichts mehr verletzen. Ich bin unverletzlich geworden. Ich habe in Drachenblut gebadet, und kein Lindenblatt ließ mich irgendwo schutzlos (p.209).

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Kane, ‘Germany – Allemagne. Hard times and damaged lives: some recent fiction from Austria and Germany East and West’, *Pen International*, 1/1986, pp.13-17, here p.16.

<sup>17</sup> Carole Angier, ‘Isolation and despair’, *New Statesman*, 13 July 1990.

<sup>18</sup> Phillip McKnight, *Understanding Christoph Hein* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1995), p.162.



Claudia's dragon-blood armour represents a defence mechanism to protect her from emotional pain by sealing her off from the world. It is not only her own experiences which have caused her to adopt such a tone, but the relationships of those around her. She describes the people she knows as being involved in loveless and false relationships (pp.56-57, pp.78-79). If Claudia starts to dwell on these relationships, a defence mechanism seems to set in, preventing her from confronting unpleasant aspects of life or things she cannot understand. This mechanism is reflected in much of the book's language and narrative style. Whilst we should perhaps expect clinical language from a doctor, Claudia's voice points to an attempt to avoid anything which might expose her emotional fragility. Her clipped use of language lends the impression that we are dealing with someone who has intentionally constructed a world for herself in which she can safely survive.

From the outset, dialogue is scarce. Instead, the subjunctive mood of reported speech is used heavily. Even in the instances where dialogue is apparently occurring, characters are not given the freedom to express themselves in their own voice. Instead, they have to pass through the consciousness of Claudia, who is controlling the narrative:

Als Karla den Kleiderschrank öffnete und meinen Mantel sah, fragte sie, ob ich zu einer Beerdigung gehe. [...] Nun kamen die üblichen Bemerkungen, ein Verwandter, ach, ein Freund, ja, das ist schlimm, war er noch jung, ach, das ist sehr schlimm, wie gut ich Sie verstehe, Sie sehen auch ganz blaß aus (p.11).

When we do find real dialogue, it is short and sharp in nature. The story's first conversation occurs in a florist's at the crematorium where Henry's funeral is taking place:

Sie wünschen?

Sie schaute auf meinen Nelkenstrauß.

Können Sie mir sagen, welche Trauerfeier jetzt stattfindet?

Fragen Sie den Küster.

Ihre Stimme war müde. Sie wußte nun, was sie zuvor ahnte, ich würde nichts kaufen.

Wo kann ich den Küster finden?

Irgendwo da (p.18).

Generally, there are few questions, even in the dialogue, and Claudia's and Henry's conversations in particular often consist of statements expressed in turn, rather than a genuine form of communication. The lack of punctuation reflects the bare, cold atmosphere. There is scarcely any sense of Claudia and Henry finding common ground or relaxation in each other's company, and Henry remains 'der fremde Freund' to her throughout their relationship. We should not doubt Henry's ability to hurt Claudia, however. Her vulnerability is clear when he casually mentions that he is married. In an attempt to maintain her composure and self-defence (as she subsequently admits), Claudia uses a string of negative expressions - an act of denial - although this merely confirms how deeply upset she is:

Ich wollte ihn nicht haben. Ich hatte nie die Absicht, ihn für mich haben zu wollen. Ich war seit langem fest entschlossen, nie wieder zu heiraten, nie wieder irgendeinem Menschen das kleinste Recht über mich einzuräumen. Unsere stillschweigende Übereinkunft, daß keiner für den anderen verantwortlich sei, daß keiner sich vor dem anderen zu

verantworten habe, nahm ich sehr ernst. Ich war überzeugt, daß ich niemals meine Distanz zu Menschen aufgeben durfte, um nicht hintergangen zu werden, um mich nicht selbst zu hintergehen (p.68).

In a similar tone of negativity, there shortly follows one of the rare occasions when a dialogue, albeit an imaginary one, reveals Claudia's vulnerability. It is the 'conversation', alcohol and fatigue-induced, which she has with her mother shortly before falling asleep later that same day:

Ich sagte zu mir, du hast ein bißchen geweint, nun laß es gut sein. Nun wollen wir schlafen. Du willst doch ein großes Mädchen werden. Nein, Mama, ich will es nicht. Ich will kein großes Mädchen werden. Aber du hast noch so viel vor dir. Ich will nicht, Mama, ich will nicht (p.71).

Claudia's language is noticeably more colourful in her dreams and when thinking back to childhood than in her normal daily life. When she visits the local park in the town of G. where she grew up, she is surprised by the paucity of animals. In her childhood memories, bears, donkeys and wolves had lived there, although she now recognises that she must have been wrong as there was not sufficient space for them all. Nowadays her language is devoid of imagination and her speech is reduced to the bare minimum of nouns which are rarely given colour by adjectives. One of the few moments when bright adjectives appear in the text is when Claudia thinks back to the images of 'apartments' she gleaned from the books she read in her youth. These warm images are of course fictive and originate from a time that has now passed in her life:

Das waren Zimmer mit kostbaren Gardinen und goldenen Leuchtern, einer Dame im Abendkleid und einem Herrn im Frack oder korrekten Anzug. Räume, in denen einem fortgesetzt die Sinne schwinden mußten.

Unsere Appartments sind anders. Hier wohnen nur Alleinstehende, Unverheiratete wie ich und alte Leute. Im Sommer stinkt es nach dem Müllschlucker und manchmal nach Klo (p.24).

The tension of the short, clipped sentences is relieved when she recalls her relationship with Katharina. The single-clause sentences are linked here with conjunctions which lend a sense of enthusiasm and intimacy to the narrative voice:

Wir wollten nicht nur stets die gleiche Haarfrisur tragen, auch in der Frage, ob es einen Gott gebe, an den man folglich zu glauben habe, oder ob die Religion tatsächlich eine Erfindung und ein Betrug am Volk sei, wie wir es in der Schule lernten, wollten wir zu einer gemeinsamen, einheitlichen Entscheidung kommen. In dem Sommer, der unserem 14. Geburtstag folgte, würden wir uns, so war es verabredet, zusammen zu einer Antwort entschließen, um dann, an Gott glaubend oder ihn leugnend, durch eine weitere Gemeinsamkeit verbunden zu sein. Wir befürchteten beide den Protest der Familie, wenn sich in jenem Sommer eine von uns zu einer gegensätzlichen Weltanschauung bereit finden würde, aber davon abgesehen, sahen wir keine Schwierigkeiten (p.147).

This is one of the few moments when Claudia breaks free of the self-imposed “ich” boundary and refers to herself as part of a “wir”. The story is structured around the move from the “ich” at the beginning of chapter two, through the tentative steps towards “wir” in her relationship with Henry before returning to the isolated “ich” again at the end of the book. Yet even in the middle section, when hopes of a warmer tone and narrative voice are raised, Claudia does her utmost to check herself when she drifts into any kind of collective identity. An example of this can be found when she thinks back to her school sports lessons and the expressions which her teacher used to insult his pupils:

Die Bemerkungen von Herrn Ebert träufelten auf uns wie eine klebrige, alles verschmierende Masse, die uns starr und leblos machte. Daß seine Ausdrücke uns tiefer verletzen sollten als nur in unserem sportlichen Ehrgeiz - "Matschpflaumen" waren ausschließlich die Mädchen, "Saftsack" galt für die Jungen -, begriffen wir erst später. Begriff ich erst später (p.135).

On other occasions when the reader might think that the language could become softer and more intimate, such as when she describes the night sky as Henry drives away from her clinic, she invariably disappoints by keeping her guard up with her cold tone:

Ich stand vor der Klinik und sah seinem Wagen nach. Es war kalt, und ich fröstelte. Der Himmel war wolkenlos und zeigte gleichmütig die Pracht seiner Sterne. Das Blut in meinem Kopf pochte. Das kam von der Müdigkeit. Ich atmete tief durch. Dann ging ich ins Haus (p.127).

When Claudia does use adjectives, they generally suggest decay, reflecting her lack of optimism. This is apparent when she describes the images of the mill she chooses to photograph:

Ich fotografierte den zerfallenen, ziegellosen Dachstuhl, in dem eine kleine Birke wuchs mit hellen, fast farblosen Blättern. Um sie zu erreichen, mußte ich an den Mauerresten emporklettern. Oben lag Gerümpel, ein altes Radio, verrostete Gartengeräte, ein Holzbock, durchgefaltete blasige Pappe (p.65).

The world she creates for herself does not allow for colour. The dream sequence (and thus the book) begins with the depiction of a landscape which is "cypress

green". This is one of the rare adjectives of colour in the text. Yet even this choice of colour is rather sinister: the cypress tree has scale-like leaves which are used as a symbol of mourning. An absence of colour and flavour is perhaps indicative of Claudia's lack of sensual reactions, which consolidates her attempt to reinforce the degree of distance between herself and the world. Visual perception dominates the text at the expense of sound, smell, taste and touch (let alone emotional responses), all of which are far too intrusive for Claudia. Henry's funeral is a prime example of this as we are given a detached visual description. Sound can be reassuring - such as her own voice (p.31), Henry's (p.29) or that of the priest at the funeral (p.20) - but only for its tone and rhythm and not for its content, which requires the active participation of the individual. When Henry visits her at work, Claudia tells us: "Ich lag auf der Pritsche, Henry saß neben mir und erzählte. Ich lauschte mehr seiner Stimme als dem, was er sagte" (p.120). The thought of touching Carla, her assistant, makes her uncomfortable (p.51), and the smells and sounds of other people, such as in the cinema (p.112) or the peace of her flat (p.32), are deemed an invasion of her privacy. This reluctance to expose feelings or to get close to other people by engaging in emotional or sensual contact helps to explain why her preferred hobby is photography, and why she favours landscapes over people in the images she selects.

## **TEMPORAL DISTANCING**

The defence mechanism of keeping things under control can also be seen in the temporal structure of the story, which Claudia regulates tightly. The action takes place over twelve chapters (the thirteenth and final chapter is recounted from a present-day perspective) which cover twelve months from April to April.

Although the length of the chapters varies from one day (chapters one and five) to six weeks (chapter ten) and even five months (chapter twelve), and despite the gaps of several weeks which separate chapters on more than one occasion (five and six, seven and eight, eight and nine, nine and ten), the passing of time is clearly marked throughout the text. We know, for instance, that Claudia meets Henry for the first time on a Monday and that three days pass before she sees him again. It seems important to Claudia to tell us when each event takes place, as if she is trying to construct some sort of framework to her story. The progression is easy to follow up to the new year (end of chapter eleven). She then skips through the last four months of her relationship with Henry from January before telling us that he died on 18 April. There are therefore two elements of distance in the temporal structure of the text. In addition to the distance she has left between his death and her narration of the story (six months), she also keeps her distance from the last months of Henry's life. She cannot bring herself, we suspect, to narrate events which are still relatively fresh and potentially painful in her mind.

Claudia's use of tenses throughout the action is revealing both of the control she wishes to assert over the narrative and of the complex layering of time which Hein uses in *Der fremde Freund*. The pattern of the imperfect tense and the subjunctive mood to recount past events and speech respectively, combined with the present tense to add insights from today's perspective, is established from the outset: "Vielleicht gehörte er nicht zur Armee, sondern zur Polizei. Ich weiß die Uniformen nicht zu unterscheiden. Unter der Pelerine ragte eine Tasche hervor, ein Diplomatenkoffer" (p.8). The present-day voice also attempts to make sense

of the past events; Claudia occasionally interrupts the narrative flow of her account in the past tense to present us with paragraphs in the present tense:

Ich glaube nicht, daß irgend jemandem diese Anzeige etwas bedeutet. In meinem Haus sterben zu viele Leute. Hier wohnen einfach zu viele alte Leute. Da hängen jeden Monat diese schwarzumrandeten Karten im Hausflur, drei, vier Tage lang, bis sie jemand abreißt. Ich glaube nicht, daß Henry hier außer mir jemanden kannte. Er hätte es mir sicher gesagt (p.9).

The degree to which the present-day Claudia is detectable varies throughout the text. Chapter five moves very quickly and is narrated in the imperfect tense as it recounts many events in the past, such as the narrowly avoided car crash and Henry's revelation that he is married. Claudia does not want to confront these moments, hence the quick tempo and lack of present-day reflection. Chapter six, by contrast, moves at a slower pace and her interventions in the narrative are more frequent. Here she is on holiday by a lake and she intervenes in the narrative to put the holiday in context. She tells us that she spends every summer holiday there, following the same routine ("Im Urlaub gehe ich früh ins Bett" p.74, "Tagesüber liege ich am Strand" p.75), and she takes the opportunity to introduce us to new characters such as Gertrud und Jochen.

Although Claudia evidently feels the need to create a structure to her story by regularly marking time, the passing of time is clearly threatening to her, as her penchant for describing people by their age suggests (e.g. p.19, p.72, p.124). Claudia is categorising people and trying to find her place in relation to them, possibly a result of the fact that, by the end of the story, she has just turned forty. The only break in the progression is when summer time is introduced and the



clock advances by one hour. Otherwise, time passes “mit der Stupidität eines Perpendikelschlags” (p.197). Claudia has difficulty adapting to new rhythms, as she admits after returning to Berlin from her summer holiday: “Nach dem Urlaub strengt mich die Arbeit mehr an. Ich kann mich schwer umstellen [...]. Ich vertrage es nicht, den gewohnten Rhythmus zu unterbrechen” (p.99).

Yet, whilst the action in the book is restricted to twelve months, this time does not exist in a vacuum, independent of the past. Indeed, one of the most intriguing features of *Der fremde Freund* is the way in which the past influences the present. Initially these references are not illustrated or explained, but the presence of the past in Claudia’s mind is unmistakable, particularly her childhood. At various points in the text, the links to the past are made explicit. When she goes home to her parents, she feels uncomfortable when returned to the context of her childhood as her mother refers to her as “child” (p.40). The tension between her mother’s efforts at intimacy and Claudia’s obvious discomfort at this is at times intense. When her parents kiss her goodnight during her visit, she is not transported back to her childhood; instead it makes her childhood seem unreal to her. Emotionally, she has cut herself off from this time.

Unlike her mother, who still buys the same school exercise books which Claudia and her sister had used as children (p.172), Claudia is extremely wary of nostalgia and prefers to doubt the accuracy of her memories rather than opening herself to her past. At an early stage in their relationship, Henry asks her about her childhood:

Henry fragte mich, wie das damals gewesen wäre. Ich fragte ihn, was er meine, und er sagte: Damals, in dieser Kleinstadt. Ich sagte, daß ich nur

unbestimmte Erinnerungen hätte und nicht sicher wäre, wie weit sie durch die Jahre verfälscht seien.

Ich glaube, sagte ich, ich war damals anders (p.84).

In chapter nine, she recounts her trip to the town of G. where she grew up, but again she does not let herself get emotionally close to this period of her life:

Ich weiß nicht mehr, wie der Sportlehrer an der Oberschule hieß. In meiner Erinnerung ist es Herr Ebert, aber ich weiß, daß ich mich täusche. Es muß ein anderer Lehrer gewesen sein, es war eine andere Schule und eine andere Stadt (p.135).

By saying that everything was different then, Claudia is giving herself an escape route from the painstaking task of remembering her childhood and establishing the link between the person she was then and the one she is now. She is right in thinking that she has changed, although this should be less a cause to doubt the validity of the memory than a reason for her to ask why she is now different and why she cannot reconcile this new identity with the old one. Claudia subsequently regrets returning to G., possibly due to the feelings of vulnerability which she has experienced during the visit. Any external influence on the world she has constructed for herself is disorientating and uncomfortable for her.

This distancing defence mechanism is also evident when she restricts her memory to the twelve-month framework of the action. As Phillip McKnight points out, after Henry's funeral Claudia stops in a café for a cognac in order to think about him and the funeral, but she quickly gives up. In chapter twelve we are told that she had been trying to think about him for many days immediately following his death (p.205), without success. Yet this mental block occurs time

and again throughout the story and is not simply a reaction to his death. Towards the end of chapter two, the morning after the night when Henry has called at her flat and spent the night with her, she says: "Ich mußte an Henry denken" (p.31), before standing up, opening the balcony door, returning to her breakfast and reading the personal column in her newspaper instead. After washing up, she has a cigarette and, half an hour later, goes to work. She has not given Henry a single thought. The third chapter is brought to a similar end to the two previous ones, with Claudia failing to get to grips with an issue which threatens her sense of order. She returns to Berlin after a weekend at her parents' house in the country and says: "Im Bett dachte ich an meine Eltern, aber ich konnte keinen klaren Gedanken fassen. Es war nur so ein ungefähres Erinnern. Ich schlief bald ein" (p.48). This is further evidence that anything which puts her into a 'we' context rather than her self-imposed 'I' is threatening to her and is therefore dismissed from her mind.

The distancing of Henry can also be seen on a sub-conscious level in the voice of the present-day narrator as she attempts to set out mundane background knowledge of their relationship such as when and where they met. On both of these occasions she begins by mentioning his name but easily becomes side-tracked with thoughts about the block of flats she lives in. Right at the beginning of chapter two, for example, we are told: "Ich kannte Henry ein Jahr. Er wohnte in der gleichen Etage des Hochhauses, in der ich noch heute meine Wohnung habe. Es ist ein Gebäude mit Einzimmerwohnungen. Man nennt sie jetzt Apartments" (p.24). At the beginning of the next paragraph, she states: "Ich weiß nicht, wann Henry hier einzog. Die Mieter in diesem Haus wechseln sehr

häufig. Die Jungen heiraten, und die Alten sterben. Man wohnt hier nur auf Abruf" (p.24).

The thirteenth and last chapter of the book, which takes place beyond the narrated action and is largely narrated in the present tense, represents hope for the reader that Claudia will have been able to break free of her tightly regulated life. In fact, she is now caught in her self-imposed rhythm more tightly than ever, as reflected by her staccato-style speech:

Ich bin mit meiner Wohnung zufrieden. Meine Haut ist in Ordnung. Was mir Spaß macht, kann ich mir leisten. Ich bin gesund. Alles was ich erreichen konnte, habe ich erreicht. Ich wüßte nichts, was mir fehlt. Ich habe es geschafft. Mir geht es gut.

Ende (p.211).

The future does not hold any prospect of hope, and the biggest joy which Claudia has to look forward to is buying a new car in February. She has blocked off optimism for the future and nostalgia for the past out of fear of getting hurt or reawakening her vulnerability. She can only trust the present. Emmerich draws an interesting comparison to Volker Braun's *Unvollendete Geschichte*. Whilst Braun's book ends with the open comment: "Hier begannen, während die eine nicht zu Ende war, andere Geschichten", *Der fremde Freund* closes with the resolutely definitive "Ende".<sup>19</sup> Whereas Braun's protagonist Karen has temporarily withdrawn from social engagement to wait for the birth of her baby as "das einzige bemerkenswerte Ereignis des Jahrhunderts",<sup>20</sup> Claudia appears to

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<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p.307.

<sup>20</sup> For purposes of page references, see the edition Volker Braun, *Unvollendete Geschichte* (edited by A. Hollis) (Manchester, 1988), p.78.

have gone one stage further by even dismissing the act of conception and carrying an unborn child as having relevance to her existence.

In addition to Claudia's distance to the past and future, she also shies away from wider socio-political developments. She avoids political discussions (e.g. a debate with her father on China when she visits her parents, p.43). Henry has a similar attitude to Claudia with regard to political issues. When a West German asks him what he thinks of 'the German question', he replies that he has spent the whole day on the beach, has got sand all over his body and will have to wash his hair that evening (p.86). Yet, similarly to some of the characters from Hein's collection of short stories, it is not possible for Claudia to detach herself fully from her society. Julian Rayner sees the central theme of *Der fremde Freund* as being "the manner in which social identity is moulded by big history".<sup>21</sup> Walburga Freund-Spork reaches the conclusion: "Die Novelle spiegelt in erschütternder Weise die Ohnmacht und die Hilflosigkeit der Menschen gegenüber einem übermächtig gewordenen Außen".<sup>22</sup> David Clarke argues that "the GDR state is shown to be responsible to a large extent for Claudia's situation".<sup>23</sup>

The 1953 uprising and its suppression by Soviet tanks occurred during Claudia's childhood and is recounted by her as an adult. When recalling the response of teachers and other adults to this event, which consisted of not discussing it, she states that she too "lernte zu schweigen" (p.146). She also recounts the shame

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<sup>21</sup> Julian Rayner, *Christoph Hein: The Concept and Development of the Role of the Chronicler* (unpublished PhD thesis) (University of Edinburgh, 1997), p.77.

<sup>22</sup> Walburga Freund-Spork, 'Jeder für sich. Christoph Hein: "Drachenblut"' in Winfried Freund (ed.), *Deutsche Novellen* (Munich, 1993), pp.291-300, here p.295.

<sup>23</sup> David Clarke, '*Diese merkwürdige Kleinigkeit einer Vision*': *Continuity in Christoph Hein's Prose Fiction* (unpublished PhD thesis) (University of Wales, Swansea, 1999), p.104.

she felt as a child over her uncle who was exposed in the GDR as having worked for the Nazis. Even when Claudia's emotional block seems to be more a product of experiences on a personal level than the 'big history' of politics, this can still have its roots in state policy, as the loss of her friendship with Katharina demonstrates. Part of the problem for the two teenagers was that a young love came between them, something which could have happened anywhere, irrespective of socio-political context. Claudia recognises however that the pressure created as a result of the state policy on religion and ideology had hung over them and contributed to their separation too. In concrete terms, the state policy prevented them from going to 'Oberschule' together as Katharina's entry was blocked on the grounds that the authorities were not convinced that she could achieve "das Erziehungsziel einer Oberschule unserer Republik" due to her religious beliefs (p.150). It is clear then that, despite her efforts to withdraw from society, Claudia's destiny cannot be totally detached from wider social developments.

## MODERNIST INFLUENCES

In terms of thematic content, *Der fremde Freund*, with its protagonist who in many different ways seeks to cut herself off from her society and shy away from interacting with her community, obviously contained elements which would be problematic for GDR cultural politicians. But, in addition to this defensive approach to life, the narrative style and structure of *Der fremde Freund* also presented obstacles for the GDR authorities in terms of the way in which a work of literature should function, as we shall see in this section.

The problems which Katharina experiences with her schooling will ring a bell among Hein aficionados as he too was prevented from attending 'Oberschule' in the GDR for similar reasons. Yet, at this early stage in his career, Hein keeps the autobiographical elements in the background. His emphasis is not on the artist's right to assert the authenticity of his subjective experience, but on working at a critical distance from his own biography, by, for instance, writing from a female perspective. By contrast, the mere title of *Der fremde Freund*, with its echo of *L'étranger*,<sup>24</sup> is enough to raise the question of the degree to which *Der fremde Freund* had been influenced by modernism in general and Camus in particular.

Jean-Claude Lebrun described the similarities to Camus in this text as "patent and numerous". He pointed out that Henry's surname 'Sommer' makes explicit the connotations of summertime found in the name of Camus's first-person narrator Meursault ('mer' & 'soleil') and even noted that 'Sommer' reverses the two phonetic syllables of 'Meursault'.<sup>25</sup> In addition to these nominal similarities, these two books, which both turn on a violent but unpremeditated killing, appeared at a similar stage in the authors' respective careers. *L'étranger* was Camus's first major prose work and, as *Der fremde Freund* did for Hein forty years later, it ensured the author's breakthrough when it appeared in 1942. Since France was under German occupation at the time, the two stories also share the peculiar characteristic of both having been subjected to a German censorship process. Camus's work encountered fewer official reservations, however, as Lieutenant Gerhard Heller of the Nazi 'Propagandastaffel' raised no objections to it.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Page references are to the 1990 folio paperback edition.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Claude Lebrun, "L'étrangère". A propos du roman de Christoph Hein: "L'ami étranger", *Connaissance de la RDA*, December/1986, pp.7-42, here p.41.

<sup>26</sup> See Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus. A Life* (translated by Benjamin Ivry) (London, 1998), p.135.

The tone in these two compact texts is simple and matter-of-fact. Claudia's stark statement: "Am 18. April starb Henry" (p.200) provides a hint of an echo to the opening line of *L'étranger*: "Aujourd'hui, maman est morte" (p.9). The language reveals logical thinking patterns by the protagonists. Meursault, for instance, says of the caretaker at the chapel of rest where his mother's body is being kept:

Il m'a invité à me rendre au réfectoire pour dîner. Mais je n'avais pas faim. Il m'a offert alors d'apporter une tasse de café au lait. Comme j'aime beaucoup le café au lait, j'ai accepté et il est revenu un moment après avec un plateau (p.17).

A typical paragraph of Meursault's narrative of a simple progression of thoughts, which seems to mirror Claudia's almost mechanicalised voice, runs:

Nous sommes sortis et Raymond m'a offert une fine. Puis il a voulu faire une partie de billard et j'ai perdu de justesse. Il voulait ensuite aller au bordel, mais j'ai dit non parce que je n'aime pas ça. Alors nous sommes rentrés doucement et il me disait combien il était content d'avoir réussi à punir sa maîtresse. Je le trouvais très gentil avec moi et j'ai pensé que c'était un bon moment (p.63).

Both Claudia and Meursault seem to observe life as bystanders. They recall moments with their respective lovers, there are a few occasions spent with groups of people such as funerals (*L'étranger* p.25ff, *Der fremde Freund* p.18ff) and in Hein's text a party (p.84ff), but generally they remain isolated characters. They display a similarly detached reaction at the funerals:

Als die beiden Flügel der Kapelle geöffnet wurden, mußten wir zur Seite treten. Vier Männer brachten einen Sarg, hinter dem drei Jugendliche,



keiner älter als zwanzig, mit langen, verwilderten Haaren hergingen. Ich betrachtete sie (p.19).

J'ai vu d'un coup que les vis de la bière étaient enfoncées et qu'il y avait quatre hommes noirs dans la pièce. J'ai entendu en même temps le directeur me dire que la voiture attendait sur la route et le prêtre commencer ses prières. A partir de ce moment, tout est allé très vite (p.25).

Michael Schenkel claims that Claudia's emotional coolness as narrator provided an echo of Camus's attempt to portray a nihilistic approach to life 'ad absurdum'.<sup>27</sup> Both characters do inhabit a private world. Meursault has virtually no connection to his society, finding the idea that he could be condemned to death in the name of the French people quite baffling (p.167). Heinz Dörfler sees common elements between Meursault and Claudia in their "Gleichgültigkeit, Gewohnheit, Müdigkeit" and in the sense of the absurd which is particularly strong in Henry's death.<sup>28</sup>

Claudia and Meursault do differ in their relationship to society, however. Meursault may be a bystander, but he is far more sensually connected to his environment. Whereas Claudia's perception is reduced to seeing like a camera, Meursault smells and feels:

Le vent qui passait au-dessus d'elles apportait ici une odeur de sel. C'était une belle journée qui se préparait. Il y avait longtemps que j'étais allé à la campagne et je sentais quel plaisir j'aurais pris à me promener

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Schenkel, *Fortschritts- und Modernitätskritik in der DDR-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1995), p.131.

<sup>28</sup> Heinz Dörfler, 'Leben ohne zu leben. Christoph Hein: "Drachenblut"', *Blätter für den Deutschlehrer*, 1/1988, pp.8-16, here p.13.

s'il n'y avait pas eu maman. [...] Le soleil était monté un peu plus dans le ciel: il commençait à chauffer mes pieds (pp.22-23).

Furthermore, in the course of *Der fremde Freund* we learn of the personal tragedies which Claudia has sustained and have grounds for believing that they have contributed to making her the person she is today. In Meursault's case, it seems that it is a natural characteristic of his to be distanced from his society. We do not get a sense that there is a different person under the skin who is being shut away. On the contrary, Meursault is extremely honest and open, characteristics which make a decisive contribution to his receiving the death sentence. In *Der fremde Freund*, the link to the past is more important in terms of creating the character of today.

In an interview in the same year as the publication of *Der fremde Freund*, Hein set out his modernist credentials, even if he avoided specifying the authors who helped to lay the foundations for the new narrative emphasis of the 1980s and 1990s in the GDR:

Es war so ein Tenor der 50er und 60er Jahre, daß Figuren in der Literatur – weil scheinbar auch im Leben – enorme Veränderungen durchmachen. [...] Ich zweifle also keineswegs an so schönen Dingen wie Erziehung des Menschen et cetera, nur wurde das in den letzten Jahrzehnten in bester Absicht ein wenig übertrieben.<sup>29</sup>

As far as the language of *Der fremde Freund* is concerned, Julian Rayner, placing Hein in the broader picture of Western modernism, writes that “whilst

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, ‘Gespräch mit Christoph Hein’, *Wissenschaftliche Beiträge der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena* (Jena, 1982). Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Öffentlich arbeiten* (Berlin and Weimar, 1987), pp.120-129, here p.121.

Hein's stylistic approach may be radical in the context of literary understanding in the GDR, it nevertheless falls short of the formal experimentation associated with modern literary movements in the West".<sup>30</sup> Graham Jackman supports this view: "Compared with more obviously 'difficult' work, such as that of Gerd Neumann and Wolfgang Hilbig, and the 'postmodernism' of 'Prenzlauer Berg', Hein's writing might appear cautiously traditional".<sup>31</sup> As we can see from Hein's remarks, however, he is evidently approaching his writing with a determination not to create role-model characters, who, through the lessons they learn in the course of a text, provide a guiding light for their readers to follow. This clearly represents a departure from the goals of socialist realist literature as described in the introduction to my thesis. This could only be a gradual process, but elements of *Der fremde Freund* undoubtedly indicate an influence of the modernist movement. Rather than being given an introduction to the characters and setting, we are thrown straight into the action with the disturbing dream sequence and Claudia's decision about whether she should attend Henry's funeral. We only learn Claudia's name on page 78 (when Fred tells Maria that Claudia has arrived), and we never find out her surname. With Claudia as the sole voice of narration, there is no scope for intervention by an external omniscient narrator to furnish the reader with additional information or a different perspective on events.<sup>32</sup> An alternative, more upbeat approach to life is not offered by a different character. Julia Hell calls this "a democratic form of authorship" in

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<sup>30</sup> Julian Rayner, *Christoph Hein: The Concept and Development of the Role of the Chronicler*, p.81.

<sup>31</sup> Graham Jackman, 'The fear of allegory: Benjaminian elements in Christoph Hein's "The distant lover"', *New German Critique*, Fall/1995, pp.164-92, here p.191.

<sup>32</sup> Claudia herself shows a dislike for all-knowing voices and recognises that, in her role as a doctor, she tends to adopt an omniscient tone on occasions, which she despises: "Du redest dir was ein, Maria, es ist alles in Ordnung. Nun hatte ich wieder diesen Tonfall drauf, den ich an mir haßte. Frau Doktor spricht, die beruhigende, allwissende Stimme" (p.88).

which the gaps are deliberately left for the reader to fill.<sup>33</sup> Hell makes the point that Hein is moving on from the notion of subjective authenticity which Christa Wolf had explored in works such as *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster*. Rather than placing the emphasis on the right of the individual author to offer his/her subjective viewpoint and insist on its uniqueness (as opposed to the objective ‘truths’ purveyed by writers earlier in the GDR), Hein, she argues, withdraws the author’s voice altogether.<sup>34</sup>

When Hein’s lector Günther Drommer originally submitted the text to the censorship body, the ‘Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel’, for a ‘Druckgenehmigung’ in October 1981, he too pointed out that Hein was not promoting or condemning Claudia’s ‘Weltanschauung’ and that the onus was on the reader to become critically involved in assessing her character:

Er [Hein] vereinseitigt sie [Claudia] nicht, er gibt kein Urteil und keine Relativierungen. Übrigens auch nicht durch andere Figuren im Buch. Die Auseinandersetzung ist ganz und gar dem Leser überlassen. [...] Nach der Lektüre macht jeder mit sich ab, inwieweit er eine solche Lebensweise, wie die hier vorgeführte, akzeptieren kann. Literarisch ist es jedenfalls interessant und sehr legitim, der Leser ausschließlich mit dem nicht nachahmenswerten Beispiel zu provozieren.<sup>35</sup>

A ‘Für und Wider’ article which appeared in *Weimarer Beiträge* in 1983<sup>36</sup> neatly reflected the difficulties which some critics in the GDR had in accepting such a

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<sup>33</sup> Julia Hell, ‘Christoph Hein’s “Der fremde Freund/Drachenblut” and the antinomies of writing under “real existing socialism”’, *Colloquia Germanica*, p.313.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.310.

<sup>35</sup> For this and other quotes in this section on the publication history of *Der fremde Freund* see Bundesarchiv file DR1 2124.

<sup>36</sup> Rüdiger Bernhardt, Klaus Kändler, Bernd Leistner et al., “Der fremde Freund” von Christoph Hein’, *Weimarer Beiträge*, 9/1983, pp.1635-1655.

narrative approach.<sup>37</sup> Rüdiger Bernhardt bemoaned “die mangelnde Fähigkeit des Autors, [...] die Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten der Gesellschaft im Blick zu halten”, (p.1638). Klaus Kändler stated: “Keine Gestalt kommt in der Novelle vor [...], zum Widerstand gegen solche Haltungen und gegen solche Lebensführung” (p.1640). Ursula Wilke claimed that “das Ganze stimmt nicht [...]. Die Novelle hätte eben als Ganzes über die in ihr dargestellte Individualität hinaus ein Quantum mehr Totalität hereinholen müssen, um ein literarischer Wurf zu werden, der uns bereichert und weiterhilft” (p.1653). Bernd Schick argued that Hein fails “angestrebte Gesellschaftsdiagnose und ontologisch-existentielle Problematik [...] wirklich in der Figur so zu synthetisieren, daß diese zu einem im psychologischen Sinne Ganzen wird” (p.1651). The following year, Rutger Booß commented in a similar vein: “Die große Schwäche liegt im Verschweigen jedweder anderer Lebensauffassung, jeder Art von produktiver Widerspruchsverarbeitung”.<sup>38</sup>

Booß is right in the sense that no voice is raised in the text to challenge Claudia’s assertions in the final chapter that she “is fine”, for instance. But readers can nonetheless quite plainly recognise that such claims by the narrator are hollow ones. Hein has acknowledged in this respect that he quite deliberately sought to create such a subtext in *Der fremde Freund*:

Es ist so, daß da die Person etwas behauptet, und daß der Leser etwas anderes auch liest, also das, was Tschechow einmal als den Untertext bezeichnete. Wenn die Person sagt, sie sei zufrieden und ihr gehe es gut, wird eigentlich immer etwas anderes, nicht das Gegenteil, aber etwas

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<sup>37</sup> The publication of *Der fremde Freund* also stimulated the first article on Hein in *Sinn und Form*: Ursula Heukenkamp, ‘Die fremde Form’, *Sinn und Form*, 3/1983, pp.625–632. This article also deals with his early publications *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* and *Cromwell und andere Stücke*.

<sup>38</sup> Rutger Booß, ‘Unverletzbar bis zur seelischen Verkümmern’, *Unsere Zeit*, 4 February 1984.

anderes noch erzählt. Das war für mich die Spannung dabei, diesen ganzen Untertext eben nicht zu schreiben, sondern in dieser Rollenprosa einen anderen Text darüberzulegen.<sup>39</sup>

Any hope to be derived from the book will have to come from readers' rejecting Claudia's method of avoiding conflict and pain. Graham Jackman, adopting a similar line to Drommer, supports this interpretation:

The very blackness of the world portrayed calls forth, not from God but from the reader, a counter-response. Hein seeks through 'unsparing portrayal of things as they are' to impel his readers to protest, to create their 'counter-world' through 'utopian thinking'.<sup>40</sup>

Bernd Fischer argued much the same thing by emphasising that the response provoked in the reader by the book was just as important as the content itself.<sup>41</sup> Rolf Michaelis claimed (a little more obscurely): "Dies ist, so deprimierend der 'Inhalt' sein mag, ein 'positives' Buch: weil aller Schmerz aufgehoben ist in Kunst".<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Hein himself has also referred to *Der fremde Freund* as being his most hopeful book,<sup>43</sup> thereby revealing a penchant for making provocative comments about his books, which continued beyond the 'Wende'.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Hans Brender and Agnes Hüfner, 'Die Intelligenz hat angefangen zu verwalten und aufgehört zu arbeiten', *Deutsche Volkszeitung – Die Tat*, 9 March 1984. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Öffentlich arbeiten*, pp.154-164, here p.158.

<sup>40</sup> Graham Jackman, 'The fear of allegory: Benjaminian elements in Christoph Hein's "The distant lover"', *New German Critique*, Fall/1995, p.191.

<sup>41</sup> Bernd Fischer, 'Christoph Hein: "Der fremde Freund"', *Erzählungen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1996), pp.252-273.

<sup>42</sup> Rolf Michaelis, 'Leben ohne zu leben', in Lothar Baier (ed.) *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), p.147.

<sup>43</sup> See Roland Vetter, 'Der Tod in Christoph Heins Prosa', *Der Literat*, 1986, p.101.

I do not think it can be denied that Hein intends a more optimistic response from this book than Claudia's narrative would suggest. One of the most revealing quotes by Hein in this regard was mentioned in a radio programme for schools:

Wir können nicht als unverletzliche Wesen leben. Dann würden wir sterben, ersticken. Natürlich kann auch die Verletzung etwas Tödliches sein. Aber wenn wir erst einmal gelernt haben, als gebrannte Kinder das Feuer zu scheuen, dann sind wir erledigt. Wir müssen immer wieder in die Flammen gehen.<sup>44</sup>

Hein believes that an attempt like Claudia's to make oneself impenetrable is fatal.

Yet, an attempt to produce hope by seeking to provoke, as Drommer and Jackman put it, a counter-response to a negative lifestyle does create a conflict with Hein's other stated aim of describing the world as he sees it rather than adopting a more moralistic approach. Christa Schuenke identified such a problem when she expressed the opinion that the negative world which Hein creates in *Der fremde Freund* in his attempt to provoke a counter-response from the reader is just as dubious as the wholly positive one created in earlier socialist realism.<sup>45</sup> She pointed to the title of a review in *Berliner Zeitung*: "Du mußt dein Leben ändern", a report on a public reading by Hein, as evidence of him providing 'Lebenshilfe' for his readers, only, in this case, by encouraging a counter-response from the reader to the world he has created. Indeed, whilst Hein resolutely refuses to interpret his work in detail himself, arguing that readers' interpretations are more important, he did briefly display pleasure

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<sup>44</sup> Hein is quoted by Eva-Suzanne Bayer, 'Schulfunk - Aus der Reihe: Der schwierige Weg zu sich selbst. Christoph Hein: "Drachenblut"', *Süddeutscher Rundfunk*, 23/30 October 1986.

<sup>45</sup> Bundesarchiv file DR1 2124.

(before saying that he had to be on his guard against interpreting his own works) when an interviewer offered the view that the text protests against Henry's and Claudia's isolation.<sup>46</sup>

Adolf Fink raised a concern about the implications which the structure of the book has on the tone of the narrative. He believed that the last chapter tends towards an excessively obvious form of explanation:

Das letzte Kapitel bringt ihm [Hein] (und uns) kein Glück. Er hätte es besser fort- als in dieser Form stehenlassen sollen. Er gibt hier einer menschlich verständlichen, doch künstlerisch fatalen Neigung zur Erklärung und Verdeutlichung nach, gefährdet so die bis dahin durchgehaltene Balance der Ich-Erzählerin zwischen eigenständiger Reflexion und verweigerter Einsicht.<sup>47</sup>

Hein has himself acknowledged that he does not disappear from his texts altogether. Shortly after the 'Wende', he qualified his remarks about not wanting to provide a lesson in his texts: "Ich versuche mich rauszuhalten. Ich bin kein Prediger. Aber ich halte mich nicht so weit heraus, dass ich nicht mehr erscheine [...]. Ich halte das sogar für eine fatale Haltung".<sup>48</sup> The absence of an omniscient 'correcting' voice and positive role-model characters, an important development in GDR literature, does not necessarily mean then that the author is determined to avoid provoking particular reactions among his readers.

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<sup>46</sup> See Hyunseon Lee, *Günter de Bruyn – Christoph Hein – Heiner Müller – Drei Interviews* [MuK 95/96] (Siegen, 1995), pp.32-53, here p.43.

<sup>47</sup> Adolf Fink, 'Ein Lindenblatt der Verletzlichkeit', *Lesezeichen*, 7/1983, p.13.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Klemens Renolder, 'Arbeit am Nachlass', *Wochenzeitung*, 13 July 1990.



## CONCLUSION

*Der fremde Freund* represented a major creative achievement by Hein. His protagonist Claudia provides an example of an individual who seeks to withdraw from humankind in an attempt to make herself invulnerable. She has broken off contact with wider society, although it is clear that her destiny cannot exist independently from it. Hein succeeds in giving her a convincing and authentic voice, which, as a reflection of her colourless life, speaks with a bare and cool tone.

*Der fremde Freund* ensured Christoph Hein's breakthrough in the GDR and beyond. This achievement of the book provides just one similarity to Albert Camus's *L'étranger*. Both are recounted in a clipped tone with little dialogue by a narrator who appears to be a bystander in the world. *Der fremde Freund* is packed into a tight temporal structure with occasional interventions by the present-day voice of the narrator. The first-person narrator, who does not allow room for comments by an external figure to challenge her bleak and defensive outlook on her life, marked something new for the GDR. In contrast to Camus's Meursault, however, reasons why Claudia is the way she is can be found in the text, and they are portrayed less as a matter of natural instinct than as a product of events in her life.

The absence of the external voice providing guidelines for readers to follow means that readers have to take on responsibility themselves for their moral response to the story. This, in addition to the depiction of such an alienated individual, is at the core of what made *Der fremde Freund* a significant development in the GDR. At the same time, Hein has suggested in subsequent

interviews that even if we get our fingers burned in life we have to “re-enter the flames”. As a philosophy for human existence, this is quite acceptable. But an attempt to provoke such a counter-response to Claudia’s attitude does put a question mark over Hein’s claims that he does not intend to educate readers through his writing, even though he is doing this in a more subtle way than most of his GDR predecessors. The author’s voice, or even that of an external narrator, may not be audible within the text, but readers do have the sense that they are supposed to hear something more than what Claudia tells them nonetheless.

## CHAPTER 3

“Löschen Sie das Gedächtnis eines Menschen,  
und Sie löschen die Menschheit”.  
‘Kontingente Wahrheitsmöglichkeiten’ in *Horns Ende*<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

*Horns Ende* is the longest of Hein’s prose works studied in this thesis. Its most immediately striking feature is that the text is divided between five first-person narrators who, in the form of monologues in the present day (early 1980s), recall their memories of the events surrounding the suicide in 1957 of Horn, the museum curator in the fictive provincial East German town Bad Guldenberg. The span of narrators comprises, at the time of the narrated action, a twelve-year-old boy (Thomas), the local doctor (Spodeck), the mayor (Kruschkatz), a local shopkeeper (Gertrude Fischlinger) and a mentally handicapped woman (Marlene).<sup>2</sup> The female narrative voice of *Der fremde Freund* is thus maintained in *Horns Ende*, although this time as part of a wider ensemble of narrators.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Hein, *Horns Ende* (Berlin and Weimar, 1985). Page references are to the 1995 Aufbau Taschenbuch edition.

<sup>2</sup> This order reflects the number of lines each character has in the text, in descending order. See Heinz Dörfler, *Moderne Romane im Unterricht* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), p.86.

<sup>3</sup> The treatment of women also provides an element of continuity to *Der fremde Freund* in that women again suffer abuse at the hands of men. Rape is pursued as a theme: this time Marlene is raped by her “husband”. Gertrude also experiences a violent wedding night and is left by her husband for a younger woman.

## PUBLICATION HISTORY AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“Hein setzt mit diesem Buch seine Erzählweise vom ‘Fremden Freund’ fort. Wieder konzentriert er sich dabei auf eine kritische Sicht”.<sup>4</sup> This view of *Horns Ende* was expressed in an anonymous report dated 23 October 1985, enclosed with a letter of 8 November 1985, by Ursula Ragwitz, the leader of the cultural department of the SED’s Central Committee, to Kurt Hager, the Politbüro member with the ultimate responsibility for culture in the GDR. Her purpose was to inform Hager of the state of play regarding the granting of a publication licence for Hein’s novel and to offer a judgement of the story. The row in the GDR over the publication of the novel had been taking place over the previous two years.

Emmerich suggests that 1985 saw a relaxing of the publication process in the GDR: whilst the previous year had been one of many bans, three important works, which had been blocked in 1984, were able to be published in 1985 - de Bruyn’s *Neue Herrlichkeit*, Volker Braun’s *Hinze-Kunze-Roman* and Hein’s *Horns Ende*.<sup>5</sup> According to this assessment, *Horns Ende* would appear to be a product of a hesitant extension of the limits of criticism accorded to authors. This does not take account of the fact however that *Horns Ende* appeared in the GDR without official approval.

Hein’s perspective on the circumstances which surrounded the publication of *Horns Ende* has been documented since the ‘Wende’. An advance batch of the manuscripts, which were being stored at the printing house awaiting official approval, were bound, placed in a false cover (Karl May’s *Der Geist des Llanco*

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<sup>4</sup> See Bundesarchiv file DY30/vorl. SED/36835/1.

<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), p.268. See also p.401 for details about the development between 1984 and 1987.

*Estacado*) and distributed.<sup>6</sup> A few months later, in desperation at the lack of progress in his dispute with the authorities, Hein's publisher at Aufbau, Elmar Faber, simply published a larger number of copies without official permission.<sup>7</sup> As far as Hein knows, *Horns Ende* is the only novel to have appeared in the GDR without a publication licence.<sup>8</sup> The SED's perspective is less well known, however, and it is my intention to focus on this angle here. Files at the federal archives in Berlin containing correspondence between Hein's lector at Aufbau Verlag, Günther Drommer, and SED officials, and within the SED itself, not only shed new light on the way in which cultural policy worked, but also expose the growing concern about the literature which Hein was producing.

As an initial step towards reaching a decision on whether *Horns Ende* should be granted a publication licence, the state commissioned the usual expert assessments of the book.<sup>9</sup> Generally, these were supportive of *Horns Ende*. In his capacity as expert commentator, Joachim Nowotny expressed his wish to see the book published: "Hein erinnert uns in seinem Roman, den ich gern gedruckt sähe, an unsere Möglichkeiten".<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Engler took a similar view, with the proviso that a critical debate accompany publication:

Das Erscheinen dieses Buches wäre – neben dem Erscheinen heftig umstrittener Bücher in der letzten Zeit – ein Beispiel unaufgebar

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<sup>6</sup> Hein told me at our meeting in Berlin in March 2002 that he thinks this action was carried out unilaterally by a printer, who, he presumes, wanted a copy for himself.

<sup>7</sup> For further details, see Christoph Hein, 'Pläydoyer für einen Stalinpreis', *Freitag*, 12 June 1998 or Christoph Hein, 'Über mich. Rede bei der Aufnahme in die Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, Darmstadt, im Oktober 1992', *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung* (Darmstadt, 1992). The latter article was reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Die Mauern von Jerichow* (Berlin, 1996), pp.240-243, here p.242.

<sup>8</sup> See for example the interview with Uwe Kossack, 'Die Genauigkeit des Chronisten', *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* (2), 10 May 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Drommer states in his report to the authorities dated 17 December 1984 that in fact four assessments were commissioned - from Nowotny, Engler, Hans Kaufmann and Beatrix Langner. See Bundesarchiv file DR1 2132, p.92.

<sup>10</sup> Dated 7 December 1984. Bundesarchiv file DR1 2132, pp.71-79, here p.79.

marxistischer Bündnispolitik. [...] Eine kritische Debatte, bei der die marxistische Literaturkritik gefordert ist, wäre bei dem Erscheinen des vorliegenden Ms., für dessen Publikation ich mich ausspreche, in besonderem Maße nötig.<sup>11</sup>

One reason for the perceived need for a critical debate was Hein's depiction of the GDR in the 1950s. The official SED line was that this decade was when the GDR turned resolutely to socialism (after a brief post-war transitional period) as an antidote to the fascist years of the Third Reich. This line found little confirmation in *Horns Ende*. Whilst Emmerich may have regarded it as the most successful story about the 1950s, which confirmed Hein's status as one of the best writers in the GDR,<sup>12</sup> Hein himself, in an interview shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, recognised the difficulty *Horns Ende* must have posed the state: "Dieses Buch muß für Hager besonders widerlich gewesen sein, weil ich die – aus der Sicht der alten Führung - 'goldenen fünfziger Jahre der DDR' offenbar beschädigt habe".<sup>13</sup>

As we saw in the previous chapter, one of the key events in the life of the narrator in *Der fremde Freund* was the arrival of the Soviet tanks in the GDR following the 1953 uprising. Hein's next prose work after *Horns Ende*, *Der Tangospieler*, also mentions a major historical event, the 1968 protests in Prague. The action in *Horns Ende* predominantly takes place in 1957 and initially appears to have avoided the challenge of conveying the atmosphere at the time of another major crisis of post-war state socialism, the Hungarian uprising of 1956. The wider social and historical context seems to be restricted

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<sup>11</sup> Dated 24 February 1984. Bundesarchiv file DR1 2132, pp.80-85, here p.85.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p.330.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Frank Schumann, 'Wer heute so laut schreit, soll sagen, was er früher tat', *Junge Welt*, 12 December 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* (Berlin and Weimar, 1990), pp.208-214, here p.210.

to smaller-scale events, such as the arrival of the first television set in Guldenberg (p.290). However, as Michael Braun has pointed out, 1957 saw the intensification of cultural control by Ulbricht, after the suppression of the Hungarian uprising had put an end to the brief 'thaw' initiated by Khrushchev's de-stalinisation process of 1956. Braun argues that, in the development of the GDR, this date (1957) is seen as the beginning of the phase of the 'Bitterfelder Weg' and that this context does indeed come across in *Horns Ende*: "Die Horn vorgeworfene 'feindliche Wühlarbeit' [p.126], die seinen sozialen Abstieg besiegelt, hat einen konkreten Sitz im Leben dieser Kulturphase".<sup>14</sup> Hilary Wiesemann notes that the SED warned against modernism, abstractionism and bourgeois decadence in 1957.<sup>15</sup>

Following the uprising in Hungary in the autumn of 1956 and the resulting crackdown, Georg Lukács was excommunicated for having participated in the "counter revolutionary" government, and show-trials took place in the GDR against Communist intellectuals and authors who had dared to articulate ideas about a reform of Stalinist socialism, such as the philosopher Wolfgang Harich, the head of the Aufbau Verlag Walter Janka and the deputy chief editor of the newspaper *Sonntag* Gustav Just.<sup>16</sup> Harich had in fact published his manifesto of liberal reform together with a man named Johannes Heinz Horn. Hein has denied a direct relationship between the fictive and the real Horn figures,<sup>17</sup> although, as we shall see later in this chapter, other sources reveal further links

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Braun, 'Perspektive und Geschichte in Christoph Heins Roman "Horns Ende"' in Heinz Rölleke (ed.), *Wirkendes Wort* (Bonn, 1992), pp.93-102, here p.99.

<sup>15</sup> Hilary Wiesemann, 'Ohne Hoffnung können wir nicht leben'. *Atheist Modernism and Religion in the Works of Christoph Hein* (unpublished PhD Thesis) (University of Sheffield, 1998), p.55.

<sup>16</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, pp.126-127.

<sup>17</sup> Krzysztof Jachimczak, 'Gespräch mit Christoph Hein', *Sinn und Form*, 2/1988, pp.343-359, here p.356. This interview was actually held in January 1986. It is reprinted as 'Wir werden es lernen müssen, mit unserer Vergangenheit zu leben' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp.45-67, here p.59.

between the two. The historical context of *Horns Ende* is evidently not without conflict.

An early indication of Hein's publishers' awareness of the potential delicacy of the portrayal of the 1950s can be found in Drommer's report to the 'Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel' in December 1984, in which he tried to play down the significance of the temporal setting:

'Horns Ende' ist nicht primär zu verstehen als eine zeitgeschichtliche Darstellung der fünfziger Jahre, auch wenn die Details des Geschehens [...] eine präzise Zeittypik haben [...]. Nichts wäre falscher, als in diesem Roman nur das literarische Abbild einer kleinen Provinzstadt Mitte der fünfziger Jahre zu sehen.<sup>18</sup>

A year later, the Minister of Culture Hans-Joachim Hoffmann was still pointing out that the portrayal was not representative of the GDR as a whole. He also recognised sufficient potential for such a reading of the text, however, to warn against misinterpretations:

Das Buch will und kann nicht verstanden werden als eine repräsentative literarische Darstellung zur Geschichte der DDR. Dennoch ist nicht auszuschließen, daß auch die nunmehr vorliegende, mehrfach überarbeitete Fassung Fehlinterpretationen und bewußte Mißdeutungen auslöst.<sup>19</sup>

As my textual analysis will later demonstrate, the root of the problem lay in the fact that the characters showed little sign of having left behind their Nazi past, or

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<sup>18</sup> Dated 17 December 1984. Bundesarchiv file DR1 2132, p.87.

<sup>19</sup> Dated 28 October 1985 and re-sent 16 December. Bundesarchiv file DR1 2132, p.69-70, here p.69.



of having made a clear new start in the GDR. In the same anonymous report to Hager with which I opened this section, the following assessment can be found:

An einzelnen Figuren zeigt er [Hein], daß sie, auch wenn sie keine Faschisten waren, durch die Moral im Kapitalismus geprägt sind. Fremdheit der Menschen, Einsamkeit, Karrierismus, Denunziantentum, Lebenslüge sind Erfahrungen, die sie gemacht haben und von denen sie sich nicht ganz lösen konnten. Ein Gegenbild - ein Bild vom Neuen und sich damit verändernden Lebenshaltungen moralischer und ethischer Auffassungen - wird nicht dargestellt. Also von den erregenden Vorgängen des Aufbaus einer gänzlich neuen Gesellschaft scheinen die Einwohner Guldenbergs kaum berührt. Sie nutzen die große Chance eines geistig-moralischen Neubeginns nicht. Und darin liegt das Problematische des Buches, das durchaus auch zu falschen Schlüssen führen kann.<sup>20</sup>

In the view of Klaus Selbig, head of department at the 'Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel', *Horns Ende* went further in its critique of GDR society than previous works by Hein had done. In a letter to Klaus Höpcke, Deputy Minister of Culture, Selbig refers to a marked contrast in relation to *Der fremde Freund*:

Wir haben Zweifel, ob man diesen Roman bei uns veröffentlichen kann, denn er ist - durch das Hereinholen der Parteiebene - m.E. viel brisanter als 'Der fremde Freund' und macht deutlich, daß der Autor sein humanistisches Anliegen von nichtmarxistischen Positionen aus vertritt. Auch wenn bedacht wird, daß die existentialistischen Ansichten (Dr. Spodecks) und die in geschichts-philosophischer Hinsicht skeptizistischen Auffassungen der Hauptgestalten nicht mit dem Autorenstandpunkt gleichzusetzen sind, wird eine Gegenposition doch zu

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<sup>20</sup> Bundesarchiv file DY30/vorl. SED/36835/1.

wenig erkennbar und es bleibt der Eindruck, daß die Geschichte bis in die Gegenwart eine Geschichte menschlicher Gemeinheit ist.<sup>21</sup>

Such criticism may appear surprising considering that, whereas the scope for an alternative viewpoint in *Der fremde Freund* had been limited by the fact that the story was narrated by one voice, *Horns Ende* contains five narrators. Nonetheless, Selbig's doubts expose a worry which had also pervaded the comments in the anonymous report sent by Ragwitz to Hager. It was not only Hein's unfavourable portrayal of life in the GDR which bothered the state, but also the fact that he did not provide a counterbalance to the characters of *Horns Ende*, who are not exploiting the opportunities of a new moral start which the GDR of the 1950s claimed to offer. The mindset here echoes the criticism expressed of *Der fremde Freund* in *Weimarer Beiträge* by Klaus Kändler that "keine Gestalt kommt in der Novelle vor [...], zum Widerstand gegen solche Haltungen und gegen solche Lebensführung".<sup>22</sup> This is an illuminating insight into the demands of the literary establishment, even in the 1980s, regarding the criteria for acceptable literature in the GDR. There could scarcely be a more telling comment on the priorities of the establishment than the fact that Selbig's positive appraisal of the novel - "er ist im übrigen sehr gut geschrieben und bis ins letzte durchgestaltet" - appears as an afterthought in his report, relegated behind the more negative critique of the fact that there is no counter-position in the book. The political agenda was evidently still taking precedence in the mid-1980s.

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<sup>21</sup> Dated 10 May 1984. Bundesarchiv file DR1 2132, p.95.

<sup>22</sup> Rüdiger Bernhardt, Klaus Kändler, Bernd Leistner et al., "Der fremde Freund" von Christoph Hein', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 9/1983, pp.1635-1655, here p.1640.

If these objections had their roots in fundamental SED principles, then other criticisms of the book were of a far more capricious nature, determined by short-term concerns surrounding the context of the book's date of publication in the 1980s more than its setting in the 1950s. The key trigger for these worries appears to have been the publication of Volker Braun's *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*. Hoffmann points out to Hager in a letter dated 28 October 1985 offering "unsere Position" on *Horns Ende*:

Die Auslieferung des Buches [*Horns Ende*] in der DDR wurde - angesichts der Diskussion zum Erscheinen des 'Hinze-Kunze-Romans' von Volker Braun - angehalten. Bei Erwägung aller Umstände bin ich der Meinung, daß die Auslieferung des Buches nunmehr erfolgen sollte.<sup>23</sup>

Ursula Ragwitz compares *Horns Ende* to Braun's novel, arguing that Hein's book makes a more positive contribution to the treatment of history through literature:

Das Buch [*Horns Ende*] ist in seiner Wirkung mit dem 'Hinze und Kunze Roman' [sic] von Volker Braun nicht gleichzusetzen. Während Brauns Zeitbezug eindeutig in der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft angesiedelt ist und offensichtlich ein anderes Gesellschaftsmodell angestrebt wird, geht es Hein um ethisch-moralische Probleme im Bezug auf historische Zusammenhänge. Er versucht, kleinbürgerliche Haltungen und Lebensauffassungen, die vorwiegend aus der Zeit des Faschismus stammten und Anfang der fünfziger Jahre noch weit verbreitet waren, zu entlarven und damit überwinden zu helfen. Angesichts der politisch-ideologischen Problematik des Buches würde ich vorschlagen, die Auslieferung erst nach dem XI. Parteitag vorzunehmen.

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<sup>23</sup> Bundesarchiv file DR1 2132, p.70.

Such comments show that literary works could fall victim to prevailing political conditions in a very arbitrary way. In addition to explicit ideological concerns, cultural politicians' whims and day-to-day political considerations appear to have been just as important in arriving at decisions regarding the publication licence for *Horns Ende*.

Yet it was not just internal GDR factors which affected decisions in cultural policy. A study of party documents reveals that the West also exerted an influence over cultural policy decision-making processes in the GDR. The anonymous report which accompanied Ragwitz's letter, in justifying its view that the publication licence should be granted in the GDR, states:

Inzwischen ist bei Luchterhand die Lizenzausgabe erschienen. In den Medien der BRD gab es erste Reaktionen (z.B. 'Welt' vom 9.10.85). Das Buch wird zur Diffamierung des Sozialismus mißbraucht. So wird behauptet, Hein "lege in seinem ersten Roman [...] eine Schlinge um den Hals der marxistischen 'DDR'-Geschichtsschreibung".

Despite his concerns surrounding the lack of an affirmative standpoint in the novel, Selbig was more explicit and urged Höpcke to agree to grant a licence:

Was den vorliegenden Roman betrifft, kann mit Sicherheit angenommen werden, daß er ihn an einen BRD-Verlag gibt, wenn er bei uns nicht erscheinen kann. [...] Der Verlag hat ein Außengutachten von Dr. Jürgen Engler eingeholt, das wir beifügen. Dieser kommt, bei prinzipiell gleicher Einschätzung wie wir, zu der Schlußfolgerung, daß der Roman veröffentlicht werden sollte, um die Auseinandersetzung, darüber bei uns - von marxistischen Positionen aus - zu führen.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Bundesarchiv file DR1 2132, p.95.

According to Hein, fears of the West's reaction also helped Elmar Faber, the publisher at Aufbau, for, although he was called before the Central Committee of the party to explain his part in the "illegal" publication of the novel, he survived, as the state feared the negative coverage this would have generated in the Western press.<sup>25</sup>

If we are to believe Hein, there was in fact little chance of the novel appearing in the West before the East. He stated in an interview at the end of 1989:

Mir lag immer daran, daß meine Bücher hier [in der DDR] erscheinen. Deshalb habe ich mich auch auf manches eingelassen. Nicht auf Streichungen oder Korrektur, nein [...]. Aber noch einmal: Für mich war der DDR-Leser immer der wichtigere.<sup>26</sup>

In a later interview, Hein contradicts himself by implying that a few changes would have been acceptable to him. Describing the many meetings between his publisher Elmar Faber and the censorship authority, he says: "Das Problem war offenbar, daß es nicht mit ein paar Eingriffen, einigen Streichungen getan war. Denen war der Autor an sich schon suspekt".<sup>27</sup>

Clarification in this matter would appear to have been provided by Hein's lector, Drommer, who gives details of what Hein apparently conceded in the process of trying to ensure a publication licence for the book. In a note accompanying his letter to the authorities, Drommer writes:

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Uwe Kossack, 'Die Genauigkeit des Chronisten', *SDR* (2), 10 May 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Frank Schumann, 'Wer heute so laut schreit' in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.210. Hein has also said that if *Horns Ende* had been published in the West first, it would not have been published in the East - see interview with Uwe Kossack, 'Die Genauigkeit des Chronisten', *SDR* (2), 10 May 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Martin Doerry and Volker Hage, 'Ich vermisse die alte BRD', *Der Spiegel*, 9 November 1998, pp.277-281, here p.278.

‘Horns Ende’ liegt dem Verlag als Manuskript seit beinahe einem Jahr vor. In intensiver Arbeit mit dem Autor sind nicht nur zwei Fassungen entstanden, es hat auch darüberhinaus eine Vielzahl von Änderungen im Detail gegeben.<sup>28</sup>

More specifically, Drommer says that the last dialogue between Thomas and Horn had been cut: “Damit wirkt der im Manuskript beschriebene Vorgang jetzt in sich abgeschlossener, vergangener. Die Irrtümer jener Jahre ragen nicht mehr so provokant in unsere Gegenwart hinein”. He continues:

Veränderungen an den letzten beiden Dialogen zwischen Horn und Thomas zielen auf eine stärkere Relativierung des fiktiven Gesprächs zwischen beiden. [...] Umfangreiche Veränderungen am Anfang der für das Manuskript sehr wichtigen Erzählung ‘Kruschkatz’ [...] dienen der Relativierung der Haltung von Figuren, ihrer Individualisierung und Enttypisierung.

He also mentions changes which have been made in the Schneeberger episode<sup>29</sup> and defends the role of the authorities in this instance:

Innerhalb der Schneeberger-Episode hat Hein mehrfach geändert. Schon für die erste Fassung war der unhaltbare Vergleich zwischen Justiz und Strafvollzug der fünfziger Jahre mit dem der Nazizeit [...] aus dem Manuskript entfernt worden. Später hat Hein den diskriminierenden Satz: “Sie waren wie Tiere” (die Vollzugsbeamten) geändert in: “Sie waren brutal” [...]. Die Staatsanwaltschaft untersucht den Fall Schneeberger korrekt.

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<sup>28</sup> Bundearchiv file DR1 2132, p.92.

<sup>29</sup> Kruschkatz recounts this incident in which his predecessor as mayor, Schneeberger, is wrongly arrested on suspicion of having acquired the property of GDR citizens who had left for West Germany (pp.288-290).

Drommer, who states that many meetings between publishers and author have already taken place, concludes: "Eine weitere Glättung des Manuskripts halten wir nicht für möglich, ihr würde der Autor nicht zustimmen. Wir glauben, daß sich das Manuskript jetzt vor allem durch eine Ausgewogenheit der Episoden auszeichnet".

It would seem then that Hein had made many concessions to the authorities. In a recent article, however, Phillip McKnight published two letters by Hein which suggest that the view that Hein had bowed to pressure from the authorities is wide of the mark. In these letters, Hein argues that comments by the publishers hinting at his willingness to compromise were part of a strategy to get the book past the censors: "Sie berichteten immer wieder im Ministerium, daß ich an dem Roman arbeitete, immer weiter arbeiten würde, etc. um das Signal zu geben, daß ich kompromißbereit war. Nichts davon ist wahr".<sup>30</sup> Hein acknowledges that he did make the stated change to the sentence in the Schneeberger episode, but other than that, the amendments he undertook were the result of normal editing in conjunction with his West German lector, Ingrid Krüger at Luchterhand, which Hein then used to suggest that he was complying with GDR censors' requirements.<sup>31</sup> It is evident that this strategy was not without success. Selbig argues in his letter to the Central Committee's cultural department:

Nach Überzeugung des Genossen Faber ist C. Hein nicht bereit, Änderungen vorzunehmen - ausgenommen vielleicht partielle Streichungen, auf die wir bestehen müßten, wenn wir uns aus

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<sup>30</sup> Phillip McKnight, 'History and GDR literature' in Graham Jackman (ed.), *Christoph Hein in Perspective* [German Monitor 51] (Amsterdam - Atlanta, 2000), pp.77-94, here pp.65-66.

<sup>31</sup> Hein stresses that he did not set much store by the arguments of his East German lector Drommer as he could not be sure of the extent to which these were genuine or really a result of pressure on Drommer from the authorities: "Daher hörte ich mir lediglich an, was ich aus dem DDR-Verlag anzuhören hatte, und arbeitete am Manuskript tatsächlich nur mit Ingrid Krüger zusammen". See *ibid.*, pp.68-70.

autorenpolitischen Gründen entschließen sollten, das Buch herauszugeben.

Equally significant to the issue of whether Hein made changes to the original text is the fact that it was around this time that the state really began to show concern about the kind of literature which he was producing. Voices can be heard speculating about the best way to handle him. Selbig, for instance, writes: “Uns scheint, daß Christoph Hein auch künftig nicht anders schreiben wird, so daß sich die Frage erhebt: Was machen wir mit den literarischen Arbeiten dieses begabten Autors?” Rather more menacingly, a postscript to a note dated 15 January 1986 attached to the anonymous document of 23 October 1985 from the cultural department of the Central Committee, which, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, accompanied a letter by Ragwitz, asks the questions: “Wer nimmt Einfluß auf Ch. Hein? Wer hat tatsächlich Einfluß auf ihn? Wie erreicht man, daß Hein sich stärker mit dem Sozialismus in der DDR identifiziert?”, before concluding on an upbeat note: “Das Talent sollte der DDR erhalten bleiben!”<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately, it is probably impossible to make a definitive judgement on the reasons behind the changes which were made to *Horns Ende* before publication. On a personal note, I am sufficiently convinced of Hein’s integrity to believe him when he says that the changes were the result of the normal editing process which may then have been used by his publishers as evidence of Hein’s willingness to compromise. It is, anyway, the case that focusing too much attention on individual words and phrases risks losing sight of the bigger picture

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<sup>32</sup> Hein is aware that others took a different view and he has referred to the ‘Hein case’ which was due to have been resolved in the mid-1980s. See for instance Hein in interview with Heinz Klunker, *Deutschlandfunk*, 1 May 1990.



of *Horns Ende*'s portrayal of the GDR in the 1950s. As for the authorities, even though they had not given it their official approval, it seems as though they were preparing to extend their tolerance of Hein, with a view to encouraging him to revise the positions he has adopted here.

## ELEMENTS OF HEIN'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

We have already seen an indication that the character of Horn could have been based on a real-life figure. It is interesting to note then that the man in question, Johannes Heinz Horn, taught logic at the University of Leipzig, the subject and location of Hein's studies. In his autobiography, the German author Gerhard Zwerenz, who studied philosophy at the University of Leipzig, remembers Horn as a level-headed but lonely man, who had, in the eyes of the authorities, a blemish in his past, and who committed suicide. Zwerenz is not sure what caused Horn to take his life: "Vielleicht persönliche Schwierigkeiten, die er verschwieg wie so vieles anders auch. [...] Möglicherweise hielt er auch die nachfolgende politische und philosophische Verdunkelung nicht aus".<sup>33</sup> Phillip McKnight has provided further details about the 'real' Horn's career and the date of his death (8 January 1958) and stated that Hein would have been aware of the story of Horn from his time as a student in Leipzig in the 1960s.<sup>34</sup> Although, as McKnight says, Hein has denied that the figure of Horn has any real connection with his literary creation, it can nonetheless be classed as an aspect of Hein's personal experience which recurs in a modified form in his novel.

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<sup>33</sup> Gerhard Zwerenz, *Der Widerspruch. Autobiographischer Bericht* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), pp.23-25. The word "nachfolgend" here refers to the aftermath of the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956.

<sup>34</sup> Phillip McKnight, 'History and GDR literature' in Graham Jackman (ed.), *Christoph Hein in Perspective* [German Monitor 51], pp.59-62.

Personal experience is also the prime source of inspiration for other features of *Horns Ende* to which commentators have attempted to assign symbolic value. In an interview with Hein, Klaus Hammer asked whether the arrival and departure of the gypsies in Bad Guldenberg act as a catalyst for other elements of the text. Hein replied:

Nein, das ist sehr viel einfacher, auch wenn ich die Dimension, die Sie da ansprechen, gar nicht ablehnen will. [...] In die Stadt, die ich da beschreibe, in der ich gelebt habe, da kamen im Frühjahr die Zigeuner, und im Herbst zogen sie wieder fort. Das ist keine Konstruktion von mir, das war etwas, was vorhanden war, was ich gesehen habe. [...] Ich erfinde keine Geschichte, ich erzähle von dem, was ich gesehen habe.<sup>35</sup>

Elsewhere, Hein has been more specific about the relationship between the fictive town of Bad Guldenberg and the town where he spent his childhood, Bad Düben:

Meine Stadt ist nicht identisch mit der Stadt Bad Guldenberg, aber sie liefert gewissermaßen den Hintergrund dafür. Sehr vieles deutet wieder auf diese Stadt hin, und für alle Figuren gibt es mehr oder weniger Bezüge zu Figuren, die tatsächlich gelebt haben. Aber nicht in einem 1:1 Verhältnis.<sup>36</sup>

A visit to the spa town of Bad Düben certainly reveals a close resemblance to Bad Guldenberg. Dennis Tate speculates that it would be no surprise to find many of the features of Bad Guldenberg in Bad Düben, such as a dairy, a castle

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, 'Dialog ist das Gegenteil von Belehren' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft. Christoph Hein. Ein Arbeitsbuch. Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie* (Berlin and Weimar, 1992), pp.11-50, here p.31.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Krzysztof Jachimczak, 'Wir werden es lernen müssen, mit unserer Vergangenheit zu leben' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*, p.59.

and a housing estate on the edge of the town.<sup>37</sup> Thomas provides a clear view of Bad Guldenberg when he looks down on it from the top of the castle tower, and refers to the church, town hall on the market square and the red-yellow roofs. This matches the view from the top of Burg Düben. According to local residents, virtually all of the features of the town described in *Horns Ende* can or could be found in Bad Düben in the 1950s, when Hein was living there.<sup>38</sup> At the heart of the town is the market square, flanked by a chemist, a doctor's surgery, the town hall and a general store which was run by a Frau Schulze until her death in 1985. Photos of the shop, which has been recreated in Burg Düben museum, show a sign advertising 'Colonialwaren', just as Gertrude Fischlinger's had (p.231). The small square in *Horns Ende* provides the setting for the homes or work places of the families of Spodeck, Kruschkatz, Thomas and Gertrude Fischlinger. The topography of the area and the layout of the town are also extremely similar to what is described in the novel, with a post-Second World War housing estate extending beyond the original small town. Behind the estate lies the Dübener Heide with its forest cemetery. The fictive district town of Wildenberg in *Horns Ende* is quite conceivably Wittenberg in real life, a town about one hour to the north of Bad Düben where passengers change trains on a journey to Berlin. It is clear then that the topography of his childhood experience was an important source of inspiration for Hein from the early stages of his career, and not just a feature of his later work, such as *Von allem Anfang an*.

The character of Thomas provides a figure for Hein in whom this personal experience crystallises. Like Hein, Thomas is the son of a professional member

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<sup>37</sup> Dennis Tate, 'The fictionalisation of adolescent experience' in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein* (Cardiff, 2000), pp.117-134, here pp.121-122.

<sup>38</sup> I am grateful to the staff of the museum in Burg Düben for this information.

of the local community (Thomas's father is a chemist, Hein's was a pastor) and in the text he is at an age which Hein would have experienced in Bad Dübén. Hein takes care not to overplay the autobiographical content in *Horns Ende*, however, and distances himself from an autobiographical account told through the eyes of Thomas by dividing the narrative between a range of characters' voices. This division is at the heart of the narrative approach in *Horns Ende*.

### NARRATIVE APPROACH

Bad Guldenberg is too small a town for the characters to be able to avoid each other, and much of the interest in the text lies in the areas of overlap between the independent accounts of the narrators. There are a few moments when the characters come into direct contact (Kruschkatz attends Spodeck's surgery in chapter two, Gertrude Fischlinger talks to Thomas in chapter five), and others when the reader is left to see the connection. Kruschkatz is told by Spodeck, for example, to collect a prescription from the chemist, whom we know to be Thomas's father (p.235). Gertrude refers indirectly to Thomas (via her son Paul, who is Thomas's friend) in her first page in the text (p.20). We learn from Thomas that Kruschkatz's wife was very beautiful and regularly travelled to Leipzig to spend, in the words of Thomas's mother, a wicked amount of money on clothes (p.154).

Although the context for the narrators' memories is Horn's death, the narrators reveal more about themselves than about Horn. The very first dialogue between the dead Horn and the grown-up Thomas contains the following exchange:

Sie haben in der Burg gearbeitet...  
Jaja, in der Burg. Und weiter?

Mein Vater verbot mir, auf die Burg zu gehen. Damals, als es vorbei war (p.5).

Thomas uses Horn as his starting point, but soon places himself in the focus by referring to the event from the perspective of how Horn's death had affected him. In the first sentences of the other accounts, Gertrude mentions her son Paul (as does Thomas), Marlene her mother, and Spodeck the gypsies. Only Kruschkatz refers to Horn, and even then only to reject the idea that there is any purpose in talking about him. Horn gets little mention from any of the narrators in the second chapter. In the third, Kruschkatz refers to a meeting with Horn, which turns out to be merely a trigger for Kruschkatz's personal, self-centred memories. The statement: "Mit Horn starb das Wichtigste in meinem Leben, Irenes Liebe" (p.87) is indicative of the relationship the narrators have to the dead Horn in that his memory provokes personal memories about their own lives.

The splitting of the narrated action between different voices is complemented by the way in which the passing of time is treated in the book. Each narration recounts the same period of time, namely from May to September of the year in which Horn died, 1957. But each individual account within the chapters of the novel moves at a different pace, sometimes lasting one day, sometimes covering a much broader period. Narrators switch between events, break the chronological progression of the account, repeat themselves and make references to events which occurred outside the narrow framework of these few months. A traditional chronological approach to time is distorted by the haunting effect of images from the past on the present. Indeed, the link between the two is an even greater source of tension here than in *Der fremde Freund*.

The interplay between past and present is central to the debate about the apparent lack of a new start in the 1950s. Far from fostering a new atmosphere of equality, Bad Guldenberg houses a class-ridden society, as highlighted by the horror Thomas's father experiences at the prospect of his son being spotted with the gypsies by his "patients" (a term he uses in an attempt to emphasise his status as a medical expert). According to Thomas's accounts of family walks in the park, there is anything but a sense of a new beginning in Bad Guldenberg. Locals are suspicious of new arrivals in the town and the walks themselves are stiff, formal occasions (p.42). Bachofen, Kruschkat's deputy and rival, expresses a view which is possibly held latently by other inhabitants of Bad Guldenberg when he refers to the positive aspect of life under Nazism: "Jedenfalls war da noch Ordnung" (p.190). As the cultural politicians had complained, people do not seem to be reassessing their basic values. Spodeck refers to his father's ability to adapt to changed circumstances and use them to his advantage: "Ich habe immer bedauert, daß mein Vater, [...] vor dem Zusammenbruch starb [...]. Ich habe es bedauert, weil ich gern gesehen hätte, wie geschickt er die veränderten Umstände genutzt hätte" (p.164).

If these examples point to elements of continuity between past and present, there are also instances of caesura, where the past is simply shut off or denied. Gertrude highlights such an approach to the past in her reference to the fact that the wife of Gohl (Marlene's father, who works at Horn's museum) was "killed by the Nazis" (p.219), as if they were some kind of occupying force rather than fellow German citizens. Thomas's experiences of discovery, be they of sensuality (p.248ff), of the private lives of his parents (p.147ff) or moments such

as when he sits in front of his parents' dressing-table mirror and sees his face reflected an infinite number of times (p.133) stand in marked contrast to the characters who shy away from self-inspection. Fernand Hoffmann uses the issue of continuity and caesura to criticise Hein, claiming that Hein tries to exonerate the GDR of guilt by blaming the Nazi past for the failings of GDR.<sup>39</sup> I would argue that this view is unfair, for surely Hein is revealing a problematic situation, and a taboo one at that in the GDR, rather than making excuses for it.

The relationship of each individual character to the past is central to the novel, and the way in which the characters express their memories represents a challenge to Hein in providing each character with an authentic voice. Not all commentators believe he succeeded in achieving this. It was claimed, for instance, that Thomas remains a rather amorphous figure.<sup>40</sup> Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler praises Hein's capacity for empathy but fears that the "sprachliche Gestaltung, Bewußtseins- und Sprachhorizont" of each figure is not shown.<sup>41</sup> A clear difference of opinion is evident in the reviews published in West Germany's two leading broadsheets, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. For Agnes Hübner in the *SZ*, Hein had failed in his portrayal of the characters since the language he attributed to them was too similar to offer an authentic view of such varying characters.<sup>42</sup> Uwe Wittstock in the *FAZ* made a different evaluation of this facet of the book, arguing: "Hein versteht sich auf die rare Kunst, einen Menschen allein durch seine Sprache zu

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<sup>39</sup> Fernand Hoffmann, 'Die mißverstandene Hoffnung. Der DDR-Regimekritiker Christoph Hein' in Wolfgang Seibel (ed.), *Stimmen der Zeit* (Freiburg, 1992), pp.321-332, here p.331.

<sup>40</sup> Bärbel Lücke, *Oldenbourg Interpretationen. Christoph Hein: 'Horns Ende'* (Munich, 1994), p.102 and p.105.

<sup>41</sup> Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, [Review of *Horns Ende*], *Österreichischer Rundfunk*, 1 December 1985.

<sup>42</sup> Agnes Hübner, 'Die Erinnerung ist unversöhnlich', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 November 1985.

charakterisieren".<sup>43</sup> A detailed study of each character's way of remembering and expressing memories will allow us to reach a judgement on this issue.

Apart from his conversations with Thomas which precede each chapter, Horn only appears through the accounts of the narrators. Yet it is worth establishing his stance on the relationship between the past and present, for his view of this relationship is the clearest of all the characters we encounter. The search for truth in the past in order to increase our understanding of the present must be, in Horn's view, absolutely thorough. The debate with Dr. Spodeck results in Horn's assertion: "Löschen Sie das Gedächtnis eines Menschen, und Sie löschen die Menschheit" (p.281). Human memory clearly represents hope for the dead Horn as a way of overcoming superficial taboos and neatly separated eras of history. We see this in his exhortations to Thomas: "Wenn du mich vergißt, erst dann sterbe ich wirklich" (p.71) and: "Solange es ein menschliches Gedächtnis gibt, wird nichts umsonst gewesen sein" (p.177). He pours scorn on Irene's suggestion that innocence is sweet and worthy of reminiscence. When she refers to the gypsies as being "wie Kinder, die nicht erwachsen werden wollen", he questions whether this should be so desirable (p.257). Similarly, Thomas's excuses in the opening dialogue that he was just a child at the time of Horn's suicide are given short shrift by Horn's ghost (p.5).

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<sup>43</sup> Uwe Wittstock, 'Der Mann mit dem Strick um den Hals', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 November 1985. Despite the difference of opinion over this issue, aficionados of GDR literature can at least feel satisfied that the book was being judged according to literary criteria. Only in the Springer-owned *Die Welt* was the focus placed firmly on the context of tension created by the contrast of two states and economic systems - FRG and GDR - the conservative paper barely disguising its delight in claiming that *Horns Ende* destroys the myths of the official GDR line concerning the superiority of socialism over capitalism. See Siegmur Faust, 'Bürgermeister in Nöten', *Die Welt*, 9 October 1985.



And yet there is a contradiction in Horn's attitude towards opening one's mind to the past as, in his lifetime, even he was occasionally unwilling to engage in this quest, his refusal to talk about his past conflict with the state being a prime example. Dr. Spodeck predicted that this would cost him two or three years of his life (p.239). In reality, it cost him much more than that. Horn tells Spodeck simply to prescribe him medication to solve his problem and leave his private life alone (echoing Claudia's attitude towards the limits of her medical responsibilities in *Der fremde Freund* as being to provide a pill for an ill and no more).

Dr. Spodeck provides serious opposition to Horn's ghost's claim that memory must be meticulously preserved. As far as the doctor is concerned, memories only serve to tell us something about ourselves because of the inevitable subjectivity of our perspectives on the past. It is therefore not the case that our memories can tell us something about the past, rather that the way in which we remember the past tells us something about us. This memory may serve as our "Weltbild", but in fact it is simply a representation of our consciousness at the present time. This stance reiterates Claudia's conviction that painful memories should be suppressed to ensure an organism's continued stability and her dismissal of memories as being falsified even before a search for the past has taken place.

Spodeck generally maintains strict control over his language and speaks in short, concentrated sentences. When we first encounter him in chapter one, the voice we hear is matter-of-fact, cool and distanced. There is little room for imagination or colourful adjectives:

Ich hatte ihm [Kruschkatz] ein Jahr zuvor eine Apoplexie vorausgesagt. Er war danach nie mehr in meine Sprechstunde gekommen. Vermutlich ging er zu Ditzen in die Siedlung. Oder er hatte einen Arzt in Wildenberg, den er aufsuchte, wenn er beim Kreis erscheinen mußte (p.7).

Spodeck maintains this style throughout most of the narrative, even when describing the death of his mother (p.202). But on occasions, generally triggered by Christine (who lives in his house and is virtually a foster daughter to him), the control slips and he reveals himself to be a vulnerable, sentimental character, prone to cliché. In contrast to the first time we hear Spodeck, when, it seems, he can barely bring himself even to mention the names of his wife and daughter, in chapter two we encounter a dialogue with Christine in which he says her name almost each time he addresses her, as if the very sound of her name can soothe his soul. His account of making love with Christine is the moment when all the cynicism falls away. The image which Spodeck uses to describe this is of the veil in which he had concealed himself tearing (p.211), allowing him to recognise his love for Christine for the first time.<sup>44</sup> With his veil removed, he is finally able to express his feelings directly rather than hiding behind his cynicism:

Ich spürte die nachgiebige, sanfte Haut, unfähig mich zu rühren und darum besorgt, nicht die Glorie ihres Körpers zu verletzen. Ich fühlte das Zittern, das meinen Körper erschütterte, und erwartete ruhig und glücklich das Zersplittern meines Herzens, den Moment, an dem dieser

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<sup>44</sup> The veil is a recurrent image throughout the book, from Gertrude's embarrassment at her stained and torn wedding veil (p.65) to Marlene's instructions to her mother to wear a veil to her wedding (p.142).

kleine, klopfende Muskel von meinem dahinjagenden Blut zerfleischt werden würde (p.211).

As a member of a younger generation, it is vital that Thomas makes an attempt to recall all that was happening at that time so that society's link with the past is maintained. Thomas's childhood is characterised by a desire to grow up and suppress the past. Even as a twelve-year-old, he wanted to leave it behind him and be rid of his "unendlichen Verpflichtungen" (p.79). At this stage in life, he was convinced that wisdom is simply acquired in adult life, hence his certitude, when confronted by a problem with his sweetheart Elske, that "es mußte eine richtige Antwort auf ihre Frage geben, die richtige Antwort der Älteren" (p.101). Now that he is an adult, Thomas has to use his memory to confront the period he was trying to flee as a child. Immediately after making the excuse that he was only a child at the time of Horn's death, Thomas tries the other angle of saying that he is by now a middle-aged man, the opposite excuse but driven by the same desire not to open up to his memories: "Es sind Jahre vergangen. Sehen Sie mich an, ich habe graue Haare" (p.5).

Thomas's memories are very self-centred, particularly focusing on things which disgusted or frightened him. His language when recalling this period generally reveals greater imagination and a tendency to concentrate on visual images rather than expressing opinion. In his recollection of the arrival of the gypsies in the first chapter of the book, he repeatedly refers to colours (red, brown and black e.g. pp.12-15, pp.18-19), and uses simple adjectives such as "heiß", "dick", "groß" and "schlecht". He recalls such details as the facial hair of the gypsy women (p.19, p.93) and Gertrude Fischlinger (p.230), and the gypsy leader's hairy hand (p.18). Thomas's wish, expressed during Horn's questioning

by officials about his (Horn's) sister's illegal departure for the West, that Horn and Gohl wait for him to build their model fox den indicates what his priorities were at the time and how little he understood of the events unfolding around him (p.271).

Gertrude Fischlinger is a communicative, but lonely lady. In the company of such voices of authority as Kruschkatz and Dr. Spodeck, we might be tempted to take her sensually tinged accounts (for instance, of the weather and atmosphere which was "verschwitzt", "klebrig", "stickig", pp.178-179) with a pinch of salt. Yet she tells us as much about Horn as anyone else, if not more. It is she, and not the doctor, who informs us that, on his arrival in the town, Horn looked as though he had been ill for a long time (p.21). She is certainly more open about herself in dialogue than the other characters. The first thing she says to Horn is: "Ich wohne mit meinem Sohn zusammen, [...] er ist zehn Jahre alt. Ich habe ihn spät bekommen" (p.22). She is also more open in her willingness to describe embarrassing moments from her past which have left emotional scars on her. These range from the utter shame she feels when recalling the wedding veil which she had to return to the mother of her friend Juliane torn and bloodstained following her wedding night (p.65), to her humiliation when visited by her former husband with his new girlfriend (pp.243-246). Yet despite this willingness to talk about herself, she is markedly less self-centred than figures like Kruschkatz and Spodeck. She tends to seek dialogue and tell us about other people, possibly an indication of her low self-esteem.<sup>45</sup> Less self-absorbed than other characters, she is a valuable witness for readers.

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<sup>45</sup> Recalling the time when Horn began to speak to her about his problems, she says: "Ich wußte nichts zu erwidern. Er tat mir leid, aber was konnte eine dumme Person wie ich ihm schon sagen", p.119.

For Kruschkat, the town mayor, 'history' is a label used to justify events and actions, an objective process over which individuals have little control. It is not something in which people can participate. The injustice which befell Horn in Leipzig occurred, in his opinion, "im Namen der Geschichte" (p.83). Unlike Spodeck, who doubts the validity of his memories, Kruschkat goes one stage further by questioning the value in trying to remember the past at all. He claims to have a good memory, but regards this more as a burden than a benefit. Significantly, he admits his memories prevent him sleeping. He produces a convenient disclaimer by saying that there is no point in going over the past as nobody will listen, based on his own hurtful experience as a guest speaker at a firemen's party where the younger generation showed little interest in his recollections. But it is reasonable to suspect that it is not so much that "die Leute werden nichts verstehen" (p.27) as that Kruschkat himself will be confronted with some uncomfortable home truths (why did he sacrifice his life and love of his wife for the sake of his job and the Party?) if he were to open his mind to such memories. The sinister nature of the dreams which prevent him sleeping is revealed by his wish to die: "Sterben, um nicht zu träumen" (p.314).

Kruschkatz, in contrast to the sensual descriptions of Thomas and Gertrude, bases his memories on dates. His is the easiest story to reconstruct as he orders his recollections within a clear structure (e.g. p.122). But this structure does not provide a framework for Kruschkat to confront his memories. Rather, the dates become the memory themselves. By focusing on indisputable facts - that the gypsies arrived on Thursday, 23 May (p.28), that he learned that children had found Horn's body on Sunday, 1 September (p.28), for instance - Kruschkat does not expose himself to more painful questions probing his actions. The

exactness of his memory actually distances him further from the events and he shies away from interpretation.

The final character is Marlene, who does not feature as much as the other characters, but who has the most distinctly different voice of all of the narrators. Marlene, the mentally ill daughter of Horn's colleague Gohl, addresses her words to her dead mother, who, we learn in the course of the story, sacrificed herself in place of her daughter when the Nazis came to fetch Marlene. The reader is on guard as far as the validity of Marlene's story is concerned due to her mental illness. It would be wrong however to consider her statements worthless because of her illness. She provides readers with additional information about Bad Guldenberg at this time, such as the fact that the gypsies only called on her and her father in the town (p.285). At times, Marlene displays very reasoned thought processes. She asks herself:

Aber was werde ich mit Papa machen? Er weinte, als ich ihm sagte, daß ich heiraten werde. Er weinte wohl, weil er allein bleiben wird. Aber muß ich denn mein Leben lang auf meinen Papa aufpassen, nur weil er verrückt ist, so verrückt, daß er überall in der Stadt erzählt, ich sei verrückt? (p.141).

In some ways, the interplay between the past and the present in her world, epitomised by her 'conversations' with her mother, is just what the other 'sane' characters are incapable of achieving. It seems possible then that Marlene could fulfil a function in the story of seeing more than the sane majority can. This role is undermined though by the way in which Marlene explicitly refers to her ability in this respect:

Meine Träume haben mir gesagt, daß sie verrückt sind und nicht ich. Sie haben mir gesagt, daß ich sehe und weiß, was die anderen nicht sehen können und nicht wissen. [...] Einmal, so sagen meine Träume, werden diese Leute sehen, was ich sehe (p.55).

Later she refers again to how little people know and to her dreams and dead mother as providers of her answers. At times, Hein overemphasises this and thus detracts from her story. Marlene remains an exception in this case for, on the whole, he succeeds in creating a range of convincing characters whose differing approaches to life and, more specifically, to recalling events surrounding Horn's death, do find expression in their narrative voices.

## INFLUENCES OF MODERNISM

Hein is adamant that all the narrative voices are needed in the text and that he could not have managed to tell his story from any single perspective, as he had in *Der fremde Freund*. This was the minimum possible number to tell the story of Guldenberg, which, he contends, is the central focus of the novel, rather than Horn or any other of the characters.<sup>46</sup> He refers to the characters as providing "gemischte [...] Stimmen, die irgendwo auch alle meine sind. Obwohl diese Stimmen sich teilweise ausschließen, ich könnte es gar nicht kürzer machen und klarer bezeichnen und benennen, als ich es im Roman gemacht habe".<sup>47</sup> That all of the figures were needed to provide the complete picture he wanted to convey is reflected in the concern he felt when the actress Ruth Reinecke proposed an interpretation of the Marlene character in the form of a play. Hein made a point of asking her and her director Thomas Langhoff to bring something of the

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<sup>46</sup> See interview with Uwe Kossack, 'Die Genauigkeit des Chronisten', *SDR* (2), 10 May 1996.

<sup>47</sup> 'Volker Braun und Christoph Hein in der Diskussion' in Anna Chiarlioni, Gemma Sartori, Fabrizio Cambi (eds), *Die Literatur der DDR 1976-1986 - Akten der Internationalen Konferenz, Pisa, Mai 1987* (Pisa, 1988), pp.439-447, here p.447.

context of Marlene's story to the stage so that "es sich nicht allein auf das private Unglück der Frau beschränkt".<sup>48</sup> Reviews of the play suggest that Hein was right: people remained unconvinced by a character who appeared especially cliché-ridden out of context. The individual perspective did not work without the others.<sup>49</sup>

The range of voices would suggest that Hein creates a greater sense of objectivity in *Horns Ende* than *Der fremde Freund*, where the reader was dependent on Claudia's point of view. Yet the higher number of narrative voices does not necessarily mean that Hein releases control of the narrative. Jens-F. Dwars sees a "verdeckt auktoriale Erzählperspektive" in *Horns Ende*.<sup>50</sup> Stanzel describes the auctorial narrative perspective as being one where an external narrator is present and in a position to intervene and comment on the action. This narrator is created by the author without necessarily being identical to him.<sup>51</sup> Since all the characters narrate here in the first person and describe their own experiences, *Horns Ende* evidently provides a variation on a different form of narrative perspective in Stanzel's terms, namely, 'die Ich-Erzählsituation'. Dwars's point though is that these first-person accounts in sum form a full representation of the events recounted in *Horns Ende* and therefore constitute a hidden, auctorial perspective. Fernand Hoffmann argues something similar when he states that, despite having multiple narrators, Hein is still unable to capture

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<sup>48</sup> Martin Linzer, 'Ma...Ma...Marlene aus dem Roman "Horns Ende" von Christoph Hein', *Theater der Zeit*, 6/1990, p.21.

<sup>49</sup> See for instance Meike Scheffel, 'Die Törlin als (An-)Klageweib', *Die Rheinpfalz*, 10 April 1990; Jürgen Beckelmann, 'Schwach! Sinnig? Sinnig! Schwach?', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 18 April 1990; Lorenz Tomerius, 'Des Autors Skepsis war berechtigt', *Weser-Kurier*, 4 April 1990; Michael Stone, 'Was heißt schon normal?', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 24 March 1990.

<sup>50</sup> Jens-F. Dwars, 'Nur ein Chronist!? Vom angestrengten Versuch Geschichten zu erzählen in der Prosa Christoph Heins' in Walter Delabar, Werner Jung, Ingrid Pergande (eds), *Neue Generation - Neues Erzählen* (Opladen, 1993), pp.165-175, here p.173.

<sup>51</sup> Franz K. Stanzel, *Typische Formen des Romans* (Göttingen, 1964), pp.16-25.



the truth, and that he is only able to get closer to it.<sup>52</sup> More important than the fact that Hein fails, in Hoffmann's opinion, to achieve this goal is that Hoffmann thinks it is Hein's goal to capture "the truth" in the first place.

In my view, it would be wrong to suggest that the sum total of these subjective accounts is one objective account. As Theo Honnef says, such a range of narrators does not mean that one objective truth is established through the variety of standpoints:

Hein hat eine Technik des Erzählens gewählt, die die Ereignisse von damals aus dem Blickwinkel verschiedener Personen berichten läßt. Doch führt diese Vielsichtigkeit der Perspektive nur scheinbar zu größerer Objektivität. Aus den Einzelimpressionen ergibt sich kein zusammenhängendes, widerspruchsfreies Bild der Ereignisse.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, the range of perspectives often serves to cloud rather than clarify the portrayal of the story. The example to which Hein has taken pleasure in referring is that of Kruschkatz. From the first few accounts in the book, we are given an image of a fat, ugly and dominating man. Hein subsequently injected "alle meine Kraft und Liebe in diese Figur"<sup>54</sup> to make the reader question the previous subjective images when Kruschkatz's turn arrives to narrate the story.

Although some cultural politicians, notably Selbig and the anonymous writer of the report to Hager, made the criticism that no alternative view is provided to the negative tones in the book, the subjective accounts do act as a counterbalance to

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<sup>52</sup> Fernand Hoffmann, 'Die mißverstandene Hoffnung. Der DDR-Regimekritiker Christoph Hein' in Wolfgang Seibel (ed.), *Stimmen der Zeit*, p.327.

<sup>53</sup> Theo Honnef, "Wir haben schon wieder weiße Flecke". Die Anfangsjahre der DDR in Werken Loests, Heyms und Heins', *German Life and Letters*, 2/1991, pp.143-164, here p.159.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Krzysztof Jachimczak, 'Wir werden es lernen müssen, mit unserer Vergangenheit zu leben' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*, p.63.

each other. The picture which each character provides of him/herself is often different from the image we would acquire if we were dependent on the statements by the other characters. In Kruschkatz's description of his appointment with Spodeck at the surgery, the doctor comes across as a self-confident man who can prescribe remedies to other people's imperfect lives. Through Spodeck's own recollections, however, we see him to be a tortured soul who has compromised his own life to the point of self-loathing.

The range of narrators also allows us to see the limits and indeed bias of individuals as the accounts often differ in their description of the same event. The degree of humiliation which the mayor suffers during his visit to the gypsy camp, for example, varies in each account. In Kruschkatz's recollection, it was the same procedure as every year of his informing the gypsies that they were not permitted to set up camp on the village green, a necessary task carried out (in the full knowledge that it would achieve nothing) in order to safeguard himself against accusations from other members of the town council that he was not doing anything about the problem (p.29). Kruschkatz does not give details of what happened at the 'Bleicherwiese'. For Spodeck, it was a humiliating experience for the mayor (p.6), but for Thomas an exciting encounter (p.13). Thomas refers to the entrance of the gypsy leader (p.14), yet in Spodeck's account (he reports what he heard as he was not present), Kruschkatz is humiliated by the fact that the leader does not even accord him the courtesy of an appearance, possibly an account which Spodeck would like to believe, given his relationship with the mayor. Indeed, Spodeck tries to humiliate Kruschkatz in a similar way when the mayor appears at his surgery (pp.47-52.).

The objective truth is substituted for a range of “kontingente [...] Wahrheitsmöglichkeiten”, according to Matthias Prangel, who has argued that the five perspectives

decken sich aber immer nur partiell, widersprechen sich, korrigieren sich, rekonstruieren keineswegs die eine einzige Wahrheit vom Schicksal Horns, sondern geben ein vielfach gebrochenes Bild der Wirklichkeit, in das jede Perspektive entsprechend ihren eigenen Bedürfnissen und Interessen ihre eigenen Auslassungen, Unter- und Übertreibungen, Ergänzungen etc. einbringt.<sup>55</sup>

This move away from the accepted conventions of narrative structure should not be underestimated, and it goes some way to explaining the authorities' problems with this book. Indeed, when Prangel listed four reasons why he thought *Horns Ende* would have met with official disapproval, two of them were directly linked to the narrative style, namely, the lack of both a positive hero and an omniscient narrator in the novel.<sup>56</sup> Although we might initially imagine that Horn will fulfil these two functions from the safety of the grave, it soon becomes apparent that this is not to be the case. From the SED's viewpoint, Horn was evidently not a positive role model given his opposition to its policy. But even from a more neutral perspective, it is clear that he cannot act as role model to the characters as he too had displayed serious shortcomings in his lifetime.<sup>57</sup> As for his narrative role, this is more focused on encouraging the others to remember than on providing information himself from an omniscient viewpoint.

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<sup>55</sup> Matthias Prangel, 'Die Rezeption von Christoph Heins Roman "Horns Ende" in der Literaturkritik der DDR: Sozusagen zur Vorgeschichte des Herbst 1989' in R.J.Kavanagh (ed.), *Mutual Exchanges Sheffield-Münster Colloquium 1* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), pp.296-309, here p.297.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, see pp.299-301.

<sup>57</sup> For examples of Horn's hypocrisy, see p.269 and p.276. For examples of his cold-heartedness, see p.24 and p.270.

By leaving spaces for readers to work out their own judgements, *Horns Ende*, like *Der fremde Freund*, represented a development in GDR literature. Honnef provides a useful illustration of this development by comparing Hein to the older generation of writers in East Germany who still tended to rely on the traditional omniscient narrator to control their readers' responses:

Der Standpunkt des Autors [...] ist nicht auszumachen - und soll es wohl auch nicht sein. Letztlich ist es der Leser, der sich seine Meinung zu bilden und seinen Standpunkt zu finden hat. Erich Loest und Stefan Heym räumen ihrem Leser keinen solchen Spielraum ein. Sie belassen Fehlentwicklungen und Versäumnisse nicht im Dunklen, sie nennen Schuldige beim Namen.<sup>58</sup>

Whereas a critical approach to GDR society was not necessarily something new, the move towards reducing authorial control over the text was. This analysis lends weight to the view that Hein represented a significant trend towards the integration of modernist techniques into GDR literature.

As well as the interview with Klaus Hammer mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the best descriptions of Hein's stance on the relationship of the author to the narrative can be found in the interview with Krzysztof Jachimczak conducted shortly after the publication of *Horns Ende*:

Jachimczak: In Ihrem Lande hat man Ihnen [...] einen Vorwurf gemacht, daß Sie dem Leser eigentlich nicht sagen, worauf Sie denn hinauswollen.  
Hein: Was die Kritiker verlangen, ist doch allein die moralische Haltung, die moralische Instanz, die der Schriftsteller sein soll. Ich lehne das ab.

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<sup>58</sup> Theo Honnef, 'Wir haben schon wieder weiße Flecke', *German Life and Letters*, 2/1991, p.159.

[...] Ich bin so unberaten wie mein Publikum. Ich kann ihm nur etwas über den Weg sagen, den wir gegangen sind. Ich kann über die Richtung des künftigen Weges nichts sagen.

Later in the same interview, he says: “Also diese Literatur, die sagen wollte, wie es weiter gehen soll, die dieses Zukunftsbild beständig malte, das gehört, glaube ich, der Vergangenheit an”.<sup>59</sup>

A specific example of this with regard to *Horns Ende* arises in one of the most interesting and open interviews which Hein has given. Hyunseon Lee asks him whether the gypsies are used to show the racist past in the GDR which has not been confronted. The word to which Hein takes exception here is “show”: “Ich habe das aufgeschrieben, was ich gesehen habe. Keine Aufklärung, keine moralische Aufklärung!”<sup>60</sup> In addition to confirming the autobiographical basis of his portrayal of the gypsies, this comment also indicates Hein’s desire to move away from the author’s role of providing moral guidance.

An earlier East German influence on *Horns Ende* can of course be identified, and, even if the work in question was never published in the GDR, there can be little doubt that Hein was aware of it.<sup>61</sup> Elements of *Mutmaßungen über Jakob* (which appeared in the FRG in 1959) by Uwe Johnson, which Emmerich has described as marking a breakthrough towards modernist writing,<sup>62</sup> can be found in the narrative structure of *Horns Ende* as both texts are built around a range of narrators piecing together their memories of a dead person. Whereas Hein makes

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Krzysztof Jachimczak, ‘Wir werden es lernen müssen, mit unserer Vergangenheit zu leben’ in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*, pp.51-53.

<sup>60</sup> Hyunseon Lee, *Günter de Bruyn – Christoph Hein – Heiner Müller – Drei Interviews* [MuK 95/96] (Siegen, 1995), pp.32-53, here p.51.

<sup>61</sup> Hein’s essay ‘Die Mauern von Jerichow’ is based on an awareness of Johnson’s work. See Christoph Hein, *Die Mauern von Jerichow* (Berlin, 1996), pp.71-100.

<sup>62</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p.147.

it clear who is speaking at each point, however, Johnson sets the reader the added obstacle of identifying each speaker, without naming them at the start of each account. Hein is equally concerned about involving the reader in the reconstruction process, but does so in a more reader-friendly way. It could also be possible, as Ines Zenert has convincingly argued, to trace this line of influence back to the inspiration of an earlier twentieth-century modernist critic, Walter Benjamin.<sup>63</sup>

If we look again to French modernism, and especially to Camus, for influences on Hein's work, it appears that *Horns Ende* is something of an exception, in the sense that there is no comparable multiple-narrative structure to be found in Camus's prose. Hilary Wiesemann has pointed out set-piece similarities between Sartre's *La Nausée* and *Horns Ende*, such as the stifling family walks in the local park.<sup>64</sup> But the review of *Horns Ende* in *L'humanité*<sup>65</sup> drew a comparison to Camus, seeing in Kruschkatz a man who speaks with the same tone of tragic irony as Clamence, the protagonist from *La chute*. The protagonist of *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, Wörle, invites a more substantial comparison to Clamence, as we shall see in chapter 6.

A comparison can also be drawn in some ways between *Horns Ende* and *La peste* (1947).<sup>66</sup> Both stories depict a soulless community suffering a crisis (admittedly a more serious one in *La peste*). Unlike *Horns Ende*, the main characters in *La peste* are all adult men. The range of characters including

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<sup>63</sup> Ines Zekert, *Untersuchungen zu poetischen und geschichtsphilosophischen Positionen Christoph Heins unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Walter-Benjamin-Rezeption* (University of Leipzig, 1991).

<sup>64</sup> Hilary Wiesemann, 'Ohne Hoffnung können wir nicht leben', p.134.

<sup>65</sup> Claude Prévost, 'Dialogues avec un mort', *L'humanité*, 10 June 1987.

<sup>66</sup> I will refer to the Editions Gallimard, 2000 paperback edition.

doctors, a journalist, priest and town clerk is however broader than that normally found in Camus's work, and, in this sense, represents a similarity to Hein's *Horns Ende*. There is a clear difference of narrative perspective between the novels as *La peste* only has one narrator. Right at the beginning, we are told that we will learn the identity of the narrator in due course (p.14). In the last chapter, the narrator is revealed to be Dr. Rieux, who explains that he has sought to maintain the tone of an impartial observer throughout the "chronicle":

Cette chronique touche à sa fin. Il est temps que le docteur Bernard Rieux avoue qu'il en est l'auteur. Mais avant d'en retracer les derniers événements, il voudrait au moins justifier son intervention et faire comprendre qu'il ait tenu à prendre le ton du témoin objectif (p.273).

But although it is through Rieux's eyes that we see events, the focus does switch between various characters throughout the course of the book. We are introduced to, among others, the priest Paneloux, the journalist Rambert and the mysterious figure of Tarrou, who forms a close friendship with Rieux. Although these characters do come into contact with each other, *La peste*, similarly to *Horns Ende*, regularly concentrates on the perspective of one character at a time. Rambert, for instance, is introduced and physically described on page 18. The focus returns to the young man and his plight as a stranger in the town struck by the plague in the second part of the book (pp.81-88 and pp.101-105) and again in part four when he takes the decision to stay in the town of Oran, where he now feels he belongs (pp.184-191). Like *Horns Ende*, the richness of *La peste* lies to a large extent in the switching between a variety of characters.

As we have already seen, Rieux describes the text as a “chronicle”, something which provides a point of comparison and contrast to Hein and *Horns Ende* respectively. He explains that he decided to compile the chronicle to bear witness to the injustice and outrage done to the people who had suffered from the plague, before concluding that “on apprend au milieu des fléaux qu’il y a dans les hommes plus de choses à admirer que de choses à mépriser” (p.279). This offers a clear contrast to the chronicle which Dr. Spodeck is writing in *Horns Ende* which he describes as “eine Geschichte der menschlichen Gemeinheit” (p.161). There are elements to the chronicle however which indicate links to Hein’s understanding of his stated role as a chronicler. Rieux stresses that he has sought to maintain the role of an impartial observer who restricts his account to what he has seen happen. Likewise, Hein is insistent that the chronicler’s role is to describe what has happened rather than make interpretations of the events or predictions about what will happen in the future. Tarrou, who, we learn early in *La peste*, is also compiling a kind of chronicle of the ‘small history’ of secondary details (p.28), describes his code of morals as seeking to understand, an aim which, rather than judging or condemning, reflects the drive of Hein’s role as a chronicler. Even if this chronicle contrasts significantly to the one we encounter in *Horns Ende* then, it is evident that elements of Camus’s work could have influenced Hein in this respect.

*La peste* and *Horns Ende* were written at a similar time in Hein’s and Camus’s respective careers, shortly after their initial successes with *L’étranger* and *Der fremde Freund*. The development to the longer novels in both cases involves a broadening of the picture and tone. Olivier Todd describes *La peste* as being,



after *L'étranger*, "similar to a lake after a torrent".<sup>67</sup> It is this sense of a broadening tone and scope that represents the greatest similarity between *La peste* and *Horns Ende* here.

## CONCLUSION

As with *Der fremde Freund*, the arguments in favour of suppressing the past are put to the reader in *Horns Ende*. It soon becomes clear though that history does not consist of autonomous blocks which can be neatly categorised and thus detached from the present. Similarly to *Der fremde Freund*, we see a combination of 'big' history in terms of the developments in the GDR and 'small' history of characters' lives. Here the examples of big history are less obvious and the private stories take precedence, although Hein's GDR readers would have understood the relevance of the 1950s setting without it being fully spelt out. In contrast to most existing analyses of *Horns Ende*, I would argue that the elements of Hein's personal experience in the story should not be underplayed. They are present not only in the setting, but also in events which occur in the book such as the arrival and departure of the gypsies, and to a certain extent, in Horn's fate, which echoes that of a real-life character whom Hein would have been aware of. Elements of autobiography are suggested through the character of Thomas, although these are not as strong as later in Hein's career.

Rather than portraying the story through one individual, Hein has split the narrative between several voices. The result is a rich creative achievement. Hein demonstrates his ability to create a range of convincing narrators who, with a

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<sup>67</sup> Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus. A Life* (translated by Benjamin Ivry) (London, 1998), p.168.

question mark over Marlene, speak with authentic and differentiated voices. This is manifested in the characters' language and different approaches to accessing the past through memory. Whilst the increase in the number of narrative standpoints does offer readers the chance to form a more objective view of the events described, the five voices do not ultimately form one definitive story. Hein thus continues to reveal elements of modernism in his work which refuses to provide readers with a clear message. The link to Camus may not initially be as clear as with *Der fremde Freund*, but it is possible to identify broad parallels to Camus's *La peste* as a development from *L'étranger*.

The publication history of *Horns Ende* shows that this novel caused the state many problems, not least because of the modernist elements of the narrative approach. Yet more significant than the debate about whether changes had been made to *Horns Ende* as a result of this row is the fact that this novel ensured further recognition of the quality of Hein's writing. Even a suspicious SED cultural politician was forced to concede that Hein represented a considerable talent, whom the GDR should try to retain.

## CHAPTER 4

“Hein hat jetzt zum dritten Mal das gleiche Buch geschrieben”.  
Continuity and change in *Der Tangospieler*<sup>1</sup>  
and *Exekution eines Kalbes*<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION AND PUBLICATION HISTORY

The Aufbau publishing house’s annual report for 1988 predicted that the following year was set to become a “Spitzenjahr”.<sup>3</sup> To justify this optimism, the report provided a list of authors from whom a publication could be expected. Among the names mentioned was Hein, who had by now clearly established his position among the leading authors in the GDR.

In 1987, in acknowledgement of his growing stature, Aufbau had published a collection of his essays and interviews dating from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. The title, *Öffentlich arbeiten*,<sup>4</sup> taken from one of the pieces in the collection, reflected Hein’s understanding of the necessary context for his work. This commitment to creating an open public domain (and no doubt his

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Hein, *Der Tangospieler* (Berlin and Weimar, 1989). Page references in the text are to the 1994 Aufbau Taschenbuch edition.

<sup>2</sup> Christoph Hein, *Exekution eines Kalbes* (Berlin and Weimar, 1994). Page references in the text are to the 1996 Aufbau Taschenbuch edition.

<sup>3</sup> Bundesarchiv file DR1 7104, p.13.

<sup>4</sup> Christoph Hein, *Öffentlich arbeiten* (Berlin and Weimar, 1987).

frustration over the difficulties he had experienced in getting *Horns Ende* published) was clearly expressed when, at the tenth GDR writers' congress, also in 1987, he attacked the use of censorship in the GDR as being "überlebt, nutzlos, paradox, menschenfeindlich, volksfeindlich, ungesetzlich und strafbar".<sup>5</sup> Even such clear language was not good enough for Marcel Reich-Ranicki, who asked why Hein had not gone further and named the artists whom the GDR had lost and talked directly of the SED rather than the "Chiffre" of "Zensur".<sup>6</sup> Emmerich gives a more realistic appraisal of the significance of this speech:

Auf dem 10. Schriftstellerkongreß des Jahres 1987 geschah etwas Unerhörtes: Zwei renommierte Autoren, Günter de Bruyn und Christoph Hein, griffen das 'Druckgenehmigungsverfahren' frontal an und benannten es als das, was es war: als Zensur.<sup>7</sup>

Hein has recounted that the former Deputy Minister of Culture, Klaus Höpcke, has since told him that censorship in the GDR was, to all intents and purposes, lifted directly after this speech.<sup>8</sup> Although Hein is rather sceptical about this, it is, as we shall see, undeniable that his next piece of prose encountered far fewer problems with the authorities than the preceding one.

*Der Tangospieler*, the book referred to in the Aufbau report at the start of 1989, tells the story of an assistant history lecturer in Leipzig, Hans-Peter Dallow, who

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<sup>5</sup> See Christoph Hein, 'Die Zensur ist überlebt, nutzlos, paradox, menschen- und volksfeindlich, ungesetzlich und strafbar – X. Schriftstellerkongreß der DDR', *Die Zeit*, 4 December 1987. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* (Berlin and Weimar, 1990), pp.77-104. Hein's prominent public role in the year of the publication of *Der Tangospieler* merits treatment in its own chapter, which will follow this one.

<sup>6</sup> Marcel Reich-Ranicki, 'Die Angst vor dem Schriftsteller', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 December 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), p.61.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Peter von Becker and Michael Merschmeier, 'Warum ich in der DDR geblieben bin', *Theater Heute*, 4/1992, pp.31-36, here p.35.

is imprisoned in the mid-1960s for playing the piano accompaniment at a student cabaret to a tango containing lyrics which satirised the political elite in the GDR. Throughout the story, he protests his innocence on the grounds that he had had nothing to do with the text (he had not even read it) and had only stepped in at the last minute to replace the sick pianist. The action takes place in 1968 and charts the first seven months of Dallow's life after his prison sentence. After a period of drifting and then working as a barman on the Baltic island of Hiddensee, he returns to an academic job when one of his colleagues becomes a victim of the political repression which follows the crushing of the Prague Spring.

In line with Hein's view that the censorship authority became less rigid in what turned out to be the final years of the GDR,<sup>9</sup> the publication process surrounding *Der Tangospieler* was more straightforward than that of *Horns Ende*. Emmerich points out that in the years 1986 and 1987, there were growing calls for the concept of glasnost to be transferred to the cultural life of the GDR,<sup>10</sup> and he has even specifically described the publication of *Der Tangospieler* as a sign of the growing freedom for writers. Its publication would have been unthinkable in the 1950s and 1960s, Emmerich claims.<sup>11</sup> Hein has confirmed that the sense of reform pervaded cultural circles and, although approval was not necessarily given to controversial books straight away, nobody really wanted to be the one seen to say no.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hein expressed this view during his visit to Swansea University in March 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p.267.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.68.

<sup>12</sup> Hein made this remark to me at our meeting in Berlin in March 2002.

Documents now accessible in the German federal archives indicate attempts by Hein's lector, Günther Drommer, to 'sell' the book to the state by playing down possible links to the contemporary political situation:

Die beschriebenen Vorgänge sind abgeschlossen, die Lehren aus ihnen gezogen, Wiederholungen vermeidbar. Vorkommnisse aus den Jahren 1966 bis 1968 (die Zeit, in der die Handlung spielt) sind keinesfalls in unsere heutigen Tage übertragbar, obwohl sie in ihrer Wirkung von damals her unbestreitbar sind. Nichts wird durch Verschweigen ungeschehen. Indem gesprochen wird, wird überwunden.

Yet Drommer does not shy away from referring to the prevailing situation in the GDR - an indication of a growing sense of confidence that challenges of this kind were perfectly legitimate:

Die Erzählung zwingt der Gesellschaft keine unproduktive Fehlerdiskussion auf, indem sie Ausdiskutiertes unentwegt neu aufrührt. Nichts von alledem. Dallow kommt auch nicht auf die Idee, der Gesellschaft DDR einfach den Rücken zu kehren, wie das ja in der Wirklichkeit gerade heute nicht selten geschieht (wenn man nur das Problem der Ausreiseanträge betrachtet).

He also acknowledges the impact made by the public role which Hein had adopted by this time:

Wenn man Christoph Heins Auftreten in der Öffentlichkeit in letzter Zeit bedenkt, so ist klar, daß mit seinem neuen Manuskript ein in hohem Maße politisches und nicht unkritisches Buch zu erwarten sein würde. Diese Erwartung 'enttäuscht' Hein nicht. Ebenso steht aber fest: Hein ist ein DDR-Autor, er gedenkt es zu bleiben, und das kann man aus seinem Manuskript ablesen. Es gibt keinen Grund, die Auseinandersetzung mit

unserer eigenen Vergangenheit, so wie Hein sie beschreibt, zu unterbinden. Es soll übrigens auch festgestellt werden, daß Hein sich auf Debatten um dieses Buch bisher nicht eingelassen hat, und es ist anzunehmen, daß er bei dieser Haltung bleiben wird (bei aller höflichen Freundlichkeit, die ihn auszeichnet). Wir legen deshalb das Manuskript 'Der Tangospieler' in dieser Form zur Druckgenehmigung vor.<sup>13</sup>

Drommer also underlines how translation-friendly *Der Tangospieler* would be as a result of its relatively short length. As for the publication within Germany, *Der Tangospieler* appeared simultaneously in East and West, just months before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

As with *Horns Ende*, there are indications that this story relates to real events. Siegfried Stadler, writing in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, mentioned rumours that *Der Tangospieler* was a true story based on an occurrence in 1961 when a group known as the 'Rat der Spötter' had been broken up by the Stasi and punished for having mocked an Ulbricht speech. Such a link to real life provoked a patronising response from Stadler, who mocked: "So atemberaubend wahrhaftig war die kritische DDR-Literatur in ihren besten Tagen".<sup>14</sup> *Der Tangospieler* is less obviously autobiographical than other works by Hein, although details of his own experiences are integrated into the life of the protagonist. Hein has said, for example, that it portrays some aspects of his personal contact with the Stasi.<sup>15</sup> *Der Tangospieler* is certainly Hein's most

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<sup>13</sup> See Bundesarchiv file DR1 2143, pp.47-49.

<sup>14</sup> Siegfried Stadler, 'Stasi tanzt Tango', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 April 1994. Stadler takes delight in recounting that, having seen their Stasi files after the 'Wende', the musicians in the group discovered that it was their pianist who had betrayed them to the Stasi.

<sup>15</sup> See interview with Peter von Becker and Michael Merschmeier, 'Warum ich in der DDR geblieben bin', *Theater Heute*, 4/1992, p.34 and interview with Peter Teupe and Ulrike Weber, 'Wir sind (k)ein Volk', *GDR Bulletin*, 1/1992, pp.7-13, here p.11.

direct book in depicting the presence of the Stasi in the GDR. Although Horn is questioned by state officials, this is the first time that the Stasi is portrayed through two specific characters, Schulze and Müller. Drommer played down the significance of Hein's inclusion of these characters:

Und die beiden Angehörigen der Sicherheitsorgane unseres Landes, die Dallows erneuten Start ins Leben, auch ins politische Leben, unterstützen wollen? Sie tun nichts Anrühiges, indem sie seine historischen Kenntnisse in Anspruch nehmen wollen. Sie bemühen sich um ihn, aber sie lassen ihn in Ruhe, als er nicht will.

It is noteworthy however that by this point Hein felt able to include such characters, who do not escape a degree of ridicule, in his work and that they did not render publication in the GDR impossible.

The similarities of *Der Tangospieler* to both *Der fremde Freund* and *Horns Ende* in terms of language, characterisation and thematic content are striking. The language of the story bears the hallmarks of Hein's earlier prose. The style is essentially simple, largely without extravagant sentence structures or verbose description. A laconic tone characterises his work. Uwe Wittstock encapsulated this quality when he wrote: "Hein beherrscht die Kunst, mit einfachen Worten viel zu sagen". Yet Wittstock's evaluation was not entirely positive. With *Der Tangospieler*, he claimed, Hein had published the same story for the third time.<sup>16</sup> This chapter will, amongst other things, examine whether Wittstock's view of such repetitiveness in Hein's work is a fair one.

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<sup>16</sup> Uwe Wittstock, 'Kammerkonzert mit Trillerpfeife', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 May 1989.



The protagonists of the stories provide a useful initial point of comparison. Several commentators have viewed Dallow as a brother to Claudia from *Der fremde Freund*. In Michael Schenkel's view, both live in niches, are divorced and childless and regard human contact as strenuous and annoying.<sup>17</sup> One of the authorities' expert assessors of the book, Jürgen Engler, stated: "Dallow ist das männliche Gegenstück zu der Ärztin im 'Fremden Freund'".<sup>18</sup> Karin Hirdina simply wrote: "Frau Doktor aus dem 'Fremden Freund' hat einen Zwilling bekommen".<sup>19</sup> In the UK, Martin Kane also saw similarities between Claudia and Dallow, describing him as "a reincarnation of the female first person narrator of Hein's first novel 'Der fremde Freund'".<sup>20</sup> Dallow was born a little earlier than Claudia (Dallow is 36 in 1968 – p.110, Claudia was born around 1940 – pp.146-47), but he is still a member of the same generation. In terms of profession, the link is more obviously to *Horns Ende*, as the main character is again a historian. Indeed, Hein, as he did in his first two major prose works, once again takes memory and history as two of his main themes.

## MEMORY

Dallow initially appears to adopt a similar position to Claudia, Spodeck and Kruschkatz in his attitude towards memories by questioning the benefit of trying to remember the past. He too considers it to be a valid option to cut off the past in order to simplify his life in the present, the position which Horn had condemned. In prison, Dallow had found it hard to think and had resolved to put

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Schenkel, *Fortschritts- und Modernitätskritik in der DDR-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1995), p.170.

<sup>18</sup> Bundesarchiv file DR1 2143, p.44.

<sup>19</sup> Karin Hirdina, 'Das Normale der Provinz – "Der Tangospieler"' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft. Christoph Hein. Ein Arbeitsbuch. Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie* (Berlin and Weimar, 1992), pp.147-152, here p.147.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Kane, 'Germany. Christoph Hein: "Der Tangospieler"; Walter Janka: "Schwierigkeiten mit der Wahrheit"', *Pen International*, 1/1990, p.44-46, here p.45.

off efforts to make sense of his experiences until after his release (p.20). When Rita had written to say that she was leaving him, he had simply decided to rip up her letter and not think about her (p.11). Now, afterwards, instead of digesting his prison experience, he just wants to put it behind him: “Er wollte die Zeit aus seinem Gedächtnis löschen, um sich von ihr zu befreien” (p.21). He tells a barman, Harry, that his time in prison was “verlorene Zeit, nicht der Mühe wert, sich daran zu erinnern” (p.16). On the second day after his release, he goes for a walk, intending, but failing, to clear his head: “Er wollte sich über die vielen Ungewißheiten, die unbestimmten, ungefähren Gedanken klar werden, die ihn fortgesetzt beschäftigten, ohne daß er fähig war, sie auch nur ansatzweise zu formulieren” (p.19). He finds that he cannot penetrate the surface of his environment. He walks along the edge of a wood, and we sense that he does not want to look anyone in the face. He turns away from car headlights so as not to be dazzled (p.19) and, the next morning, does not want to look at the woman with whom he has spent the night (p.22).

It seems that un confronted memories within Dallow’s mind are preventing him from fully engaging with the present-day world. He is treating time and memory in a purely linear and quantitative way and wants to banish the memory of the “wasted” period in prison in an attempt not to sacrifice any more time to it. The fact that a clearer coming to terms with his memories could make facing the present and future easier does not seem to occur to him. Instead of aiming to avoid future errors by learning from previous ones, Dallow wants to forget what has happened to him. He dislikes talking about it because this would be “als ob man es wieder und immer wieder erleben müßte” (p.83). Dallow is even encouraged to adopt this approach by his colleagues, who tell him to focus on

the future. Roessler urges him: "Vergi die dumme Geschichte. Natrlich wird das fr dich nicht leicht sein, aber es wre die beste Grundlage, einen vllig neuen Anfang zu machen. Vergi, was passierte, orientiere dich auf deine Zukunft" (p.37).

Dallow initially follows this advice and even passes it on to his parents as his father is having difficulties in coming to terms with the shame of his son's prison sentence: "'Verget einfach alles', sagte Dallow und legte eine Hand auf den Arm des Vaters, 'ich selbst kann mich an diese Zeit kaum noch erinnern'" (p.75). Dallow repeatedly tries to forget unpleasant thoughts (p.124, p.156), and his method of ending relationships with women consists of avoiding conversation:

Es ist einfach, wegzugehen, stellte er fest, wenn man nur auf Worte verzichtet. Worte komplizieren den einfachsten Sachverhalt und erklren letztlich auch nichts. Und er war zufrieden, auf eine ihm so angenehme und angemessene Weise die Probleme lsen zu knnen oder vielmehr, nicht auf sie eingehen zu mssen (p.57).

This provides an echo of Claudia's question in *Der fremde Freund*: "Wozu heraufholen, was uns belstigt, bedroht, hilflos macht?" (p.117). Dallow regards his car, which is in good working order even after two years of inactivity, as much easier to manage, and even as a role model (p.21). The temptation is for Dallow to 'start up' in a similar way and fit into society again. He compares himself to a stray dog looking for a new master to fulfil the role of the prison authorities (p.115).

And yet he fears the process of fitting in again. One evening he gets dressed up to go out, but is then unable to leave his flat. Realising that he is in the process of creating a new cell for himself, he thinks he is going to vomit (p.53). Similarly to Claudia, Dallow finds that his dreams do not respect his determination to try to forget the past. Prison haunts his dreams, he hears iron doors banging soon after his release from the cell (p.11), and the village where he grew up provides the setting for all his dreams (p.64). A further link to the past is created when he discovers that his father still screams in his sleep as he has nightmares of the war (p.75). Slowly but surely, we begin to sense Dallow's growing discomfort with his determination to forget and have cause for thinking that he is eventually going to undertake a full confrontation with his prison experience and the injustice he has suffered. The first indication of his unease comes the morning after a heavy night's drinking, which leaves him with a severe hangover. As he tries to recall the previous evening's events, the narrator tells us: "Ihm war es unangenehm, sich nicht erinnern zu können. Es kränkte ihn, da es ihn hilflos machte" (p.138). This unease subsequently begins to set in with regard to his sacking and prison sentence. When he is tentatively offered a job back at the institute, he claims: "Dazu müßte ich zu viel vergessen [...] und ich will nichts vergessen. Ich werde auch nichts verzeihen" (p.163). Going back to the department, he says, would be like spitting in his own face (p.164). When Elke asks him if he cannot forget what has happened, he replies that he does not want to do this (p.181). This marks a difference between Dallow and Claudia. Whereas Claudia generally keeps her emotions under control, Dallow admits to his discomfort at the prospect of forgetting the past.

Ultimately, however, these claims prove to be bravado. By returning to work in the same institute (capitalising on the misfortune of Roessler, one of his former colleagues), Dallow dashes any hopes we might still have that he is going to sustain his resistance to resuming his position as a cog in the system and, in doing so, reveals the whimsical and brittle nature of his convictions. The fact that he is needed, plus the personal satisfaction he gains from achieving a victory against Roessler, are sufficient to persuade him to go back to the department. Dallow is opportunistic enough to profit from somebody else's misfortune, rather than display any kind of moral integrity in standing up for a principle.

## HISTORY

In contrast to the acute sense of historical responsibility felt by Horn in Hein's previous novel, Dallow often shocks acquaintances with his apparent lack of interest in the political developments of the day. This is sharpened by being placed in juxtaposition to his more carnal interests. At the beginning of the story, Dallow sits in a bar watching the barmaid: "Neben ihm diskutierten die beiden Männer noch immer über Prag und Dubcek. Sie sprachen so laut miteinander, daß sich Dallow beim Betrachten der Brüste gestört fühlte" (p.16). Things have not changed by the end of the story. When the news of the crushing of the Prague Spring breaks, Dallow wants to make love with the girl lying next to him, rather than listen to the report on the radio (p.198). At a dinner party, the other guests are astounded when Dallow says that he has no interest in current affairs (p.158). He reconciles this lack of interest with his profession by explaining that he is only interested in his specialised area: "Ich beschäftigte mich mit dem 19. Jahrhundert. Die Gegenwart hat mich nie interessiert" (p.151).

McKnight's view that Dallow is even less interested in the past and memory than the most extreme of the characters from *Horns Ende* had been is convincing: even Spodeck had at least grappled with the significance of history before dismissing it.<sup>21</sup> Dallow's attitude in this respect is reminiscent of that of Claudia and Henry, who, as we saw in chapter 2, both seek to avoid political discussions.

At other times, the attitudes Dallow encounters when people discover his profession are indicative of a generally ambivalent approach towards history and historians. Rather than being at the heart of society, Dallow is excluded on the basis of his training. When he applies for a job as a manual labourer, he is told: "Wir brauchen hier keinen Historiker. In drei Jahren vielleicht, dann feiern wir fünfundzwanzigjähriges Betriebsjubiläum. Sie könnten dann für uns die Festschrift schreiben" (p.121). Not only does this contradict the basis of the 'Bitterfelder Weg',<sup>22</sup> which supposedly encouraged a cross-fertilisation between intellectuals and workers, it also reveals a superficial approach to history, reminiscent of passages in Günter de Bruyn's *Märkische Forschungen* where the ritualistic commemoration of obscure dates represents the extent of historical awareness. Even specific dates of historical commemoration do not seem to have any great significance for the general public. On May Day, political discussions are avoided in the local pub as the day is dedicated to serious drinking (p.146). Certainly, Dallow is not alone in his ambivalence towards historical and political developments.

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<sup>21</sup> Phillip McKnight, *Understanding Christoph Hein* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1995), p.93.

<sup>22</sup> This was propagated by the SED culture conference held at the industrial complex of Bitterfeld in 1959, and led to at most a short-term success in terms of cultural policy.

This absence of historical awareness is set against the background of a year which has subsequently become regarded as crucial in European history and one which, in the West at least, is seen as the watershed in the post-war generation's questioning of its parents' generation. As for the GDR, Hein has said that 1968, more specifically the crushing of the Prague Spring by Warsaw Pact troops, represented the end of his hope that the system could be reformed: "Ich denke, eine mögliche Reform in allen sozialistischen Ländern war überhaupt mit Prag 1968 vorbei, danach kam jede Reform zu spät, wir sehen es in der Sowjetunion an dem Reformer Gorbatschow".<sup>23</sup> This puts Dallow's failure to achieve a personal reform in a wider context. Schenkel argues that Dallow's inability to reform as an individual reflects the failure of his society in general.<sup>24</sup> It is indeed difficult to deny a connection between the two, although Hein does not overstate the links between the protagonist's life and the wider history of his society. The connection between private and public destinies is actually more subtle here than in *Der fremde Freund*. Claudia had learned a lesson in 1953, namely that she should keep her mouth shut. In *Der Tangospieler*, Dallow does not learn any lessons from the major political developments surrounding him. His story is simply placed in that context.

Rather than showing what a character has learned from a past event, Hein could be interpreted here as challenging his readers to question their own historical awareness. Considering that *Der Tangospieler* was published in 1989, Dallow's reference to the fact that his twenty-one-month prison sentence could, as far as his judge was concerned, just as easily have been twenty-one years (p.74) begs the question of whether Dallow had indeed spent the next twenty-one years of

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, 'Dialog ist das Gegenteil von Belehren' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft*, pp.11-50, here p.42.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Schenkel, *Fortschritts- und Modernitätskritik in der DDR-Literatur*, p.171.

his life in a prison cell of unquestioning conformism. Lothar Baier was convinced that Hein was speaking directly to his 1989 audience in *Der Tangospieler*. In April of that year, Baier said in a radio review:

Das ins Jahr 1968 verlegte Drama des Tangospielers spricht von der Gegenwart. Es mischt einen bitteren Tropfen in all den Jubel, der seit Gorbatschows Reformkurs über die Befreiung von Tabus ausgebrochen ist.<sup>25</sup>

This opinion may be at odds with the efforts made by Hein's lector who, as we have seen, stressed, for tactical reasons of getting it past the censor, that the events were over and did not have to be viewed as a reflection on the present day. But, whilst not suggesting that Hein had foreseen the end of the GDR in 1989, I would agree that it is quite conceivable that he intended to remind readers of the long-term consequences of the failure of reform attempts in 1968. In *Der fremde Freund* and *Horns Ende*, we are presented with characters in the present day recounting earlier events in their lives. In *Der Tangospieler*, the character is left in the past. The question of whether there is a link between the narrated action and the present day is left to the reader to resolve.

## NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Hein has described his writing as an art form rather than a craft - the difference being that an art can never be mastered, whereas a craft is simply the repeated methodical use of an acquired skill.<sup>26</sup> The narration of *Der Tangospieler* highlights Hein's sustained determination to continue experimenting. Unlike the first two longer prose works, this story is not divided into chapters, thus giving

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<sup>25</sup> Lothar Baier, 'Christoph Hein: "Der Tangospieler"', *Deutschlandfunk*, 10 April 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Transcript of an interview with Hein by Holly Aylett for a programme on culture in the GDR, entitled 'A Footnote in History?', shown on 'The South Bank Show', *ITV*, October 1990.



the text more of a continuous flow. More significantly, Hein, for the first time in his longer prose, abandons the first-person voice (i.e. the one voice of Claudia in *Der fremde Freund* and the various first-person accounts in *Horns Ende*) and tells the story through a third-person narrator. The fact that Dallow, unlike Hein's previous characters, is not free to tell his story himself reflects his sense of helplessness. Whereas the reader had listened directly to the protagonists of the first two novels and witnessed, or been intentionally blocked out of, their inner conflicts, Dallow becomes, as Graham Jackman has said, a "bewildered character in a story told by another".<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, by moving from a first to a third-person viewpoint, Hein places readers in the position which Dallow had experienced in prison. During this period he was taken outside his normal life and, when he had an opportunity to look in on it, he was confused. Whilst awaiting trial in his prison cell, he had a full view of his institute. But the change of perspective left him uncertain:

Da er die Fenster des Instituts, die zum Untersuchungsgefängnis zeigten, nie zuvor von außen gesehen hatte, war er bis zu seinem letzten Tag in dieser Zelle unsicher, ob jene Fenster wirklich die waren, für die er sie ansah (p.71).

By narrating the story in the third person, Hein is placing the reader in a similar situation of watching the action from the outside.

Hein himself has stressed the traditional nature of the narrative viewpoint in *Der Tangospieler*, where the narrator provides an external perspective: "Das, was

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<sup>27</sup> Graham Jackman, "Vergiß die dumme Geschichte". "History" and "story" in Christoph Hein's "Der Tangospieler" in Ian Wallace (ed.), *GDR Monitor 22* (Amsterdam - Atlanta, 1990), pp.45-68, here p.54.

dieser Erzähler sagt, stimmt”.<sup>28</sup> This change of approach from Hein compared to his previous works no doubt contributed to the criticism he sustained for having exercised excessive control of the text. Volker Hage pointed to “störende und überflüssige Regieanweisungen”.<sup>29</sup> Uwe Wittstock criticised Hein for reducing the story to a “Lehrstück”.<sup>30</sup>

It would be wrong to assume however that the move to a third-person narrator means that *Der Tangospieler* takes away the active role which had been required of the reader in the first two novels. As in *Horns Ende*, we see how characters change according to context. When we view Dallow in the presence of other people, he often comes across as a self-assured man. When he is alone however we witness his struggle to think coherently. As Neva Slibar and Rosanda Volk argue: “Wie sehr die Einschätzung der Realität durch die Sicht des Beobachters bedingt ist, kommt im ‘Tangospieler’ explizit zur Sprache”.<sup>31</sup>

What the narrator says may be “right”, as Hein puts it, but this does not mean that the narrator interferes in the narrative by constantly adding his view on the action. The narrator generally keeps a distance from the story and does not make evaluative comments. It is noteworthy, for instance, that the narrator does not side completely with Dallow to present him purely as a victim. It is up to the reader to decide upon the relative significance of Dallow’s own character and the specific responsibility of the state in contributing to his problems. Despite

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Bill Niven and David Clarke, ‘Ich arbeite nicht in der Abteilung Prophet’ in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein* (Cardiff, 2000), pp.14-24, here p.23.

<sup>29</sup> Volker Hage, ‘Freiheit, mir graut’s vor dir’, *Die Zeit*, 24 March 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Uwe Wittstock, ‘Kammerkonzert mit Trillerpfeife’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 May 1989.

<sup>31</sup> Neva Slibar and Rosanda Volk, ‘Das Spiegelkabinett unseres Kopfes’ in Frauke Meyer-Gosau (ed.), *Christoph Hein* [Text & Kritik 111] (Munich, 1991), pp.57-68, here p.61.

the injustice which Dallow experiences, we are left to question his irresponsibility in not even bothering to read the content of the incriminating song and decide whether his disclaimer that "I only played the accompaniment" is totally valid. Indeed, the fact that Dallow insists on his own innocence merely on the grounds that he had played a passive role in the 'crime', rather than protesting against the ridiculous nature of the charges, reduces readers' sympathy with him. This is one of the areas where the potentially intrusive narrator does not provide (or push readers towards) an answer and where the reader's judgement is required.

Several commentators have argued that the narrator is not too heavy-handed in recounting the story. Joachim Lehmann stated:

Anders als der allwissende Erzähler, der sich nicht scheut, seine Lebensweisheiten in den Text einzustreuen und dadurch den Leser zu leiten, überläßt Heins auktorialer Erzähler anscheinend jegliche Kommentierung und Wertung der berichteten Ereignisse dem Leser.<sup>32</sup>

Uwe Klussmann sees a clear development in Hein's fiction compared to earlier work in the GDR in this respect: "Hein erweist sich als genauer Beobachter mit kühlem, unbestechlichem Blick, weit entfernt von Stil und Gehalt der Aufbau- und 'Ankunfts'-Literatur der fünfziger und sechziger Jahre".<sup>33</sup> The experts who wrote reports on *Der Tangospieler* for the censorship authorities in the GDR emphasised the fact that the narrator is not the sole arbiter of the action. Wieland Lehmann stated that the book requires the active involvement of the reader and

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<sup>32</sup> Joachim Lehmann, 'Christoph Hein – Chronist und "historischer Materialist"' in Frauke Meyer-Gosau (ed.), *Christoph Hein* [Text & Kritik 111], pp.44-56, here p.45.

<sup>33</sup> Uwe Klussmann, 'Christoph Hein's "Der Tangospieler"' in W Hildebrandt, Hans Peter Schäfer, Bernard Schalhorn (eds), *Deutsche Studien*, 1989, pp.407-408.

Jürgen Engler underlined the fact that Hein does leave lots of gaps for the reader.<sup>34</sup> Jäger-Hülsmann, writing in the newspaper *Sonntag*, credited Hein with requiring the participation of the reader in creating meaning and interpretations<sup>35</sup> - the very essence of modernist awareness - and argued that the narrator is not a judge but a witness. Indeed, the overriding impression from *Der Tangospieler* is not of a didactic, interfering author, but of a society whose citizens either feel uncomfortable and threatened, or just numb, and who consequently become pawns in its games. It is not Hein or the narrator who is responsible for their lack of room for manoeuvre.

## THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE STATE

The restrictions on characters' freedom, rather than being a structural weakness, are one of the key themes of the story. The GDR society we see is once again one which neglects the interests of the individual. When Dallow meets his lawyer and enquires about the possibility of re-opening his case, the man who is supposed to have defended him in court asks: "Aber [...] wem wird damit geholfen [...]?' 'Mir!' rief Dallow laut" (p.137). This feeling of marginalisation is confirmed when Dallow comes across the judge, Berger, in a park and asks him how he could have claimed to convict him in the name of the people, arguing: "Dazu hatten Sie kein Recht. Sie haben das Volk nicht befragt" (p.154). Rather than seeing the state as acting on behalf of the people, Dallow is attacking its officials' complacency in claiming to speak for people who feel alienated from it.

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<sup>34</sup> Both reports can be found in Bundesarchiv file DR1 2143.

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Jäger-Hülsmann, "Der Tangospieler" - Eine ironisch-satirische Erzählung', *Sonntag*, 2 July 1989.

As a sign of Dallow's dislocation from his state, he is unable to control his hands when he feels the presence of its representatives too keenly. Not only does he struggle to sign his name as prison officials look on when he leaves custody ("Am Tage seiner Entlassung konnte Dallow seine Finger nicht bewegen" p.5), his hands also shake uncontrollably when he receives a letter from the judge asking to meet him the following day (p.171) and when he tries to smoke in front of him (p.133). He suffers seizures in his fingers (e.g. p.87), and his inability to play the piano (p.116, p.179) becomes a symbol for his inability to express himself. He cannot play with any confidence or fluency until he has taken the decision to go back to work at the institute. When he is about to return there, he experiences a brief tremble in his hand, but the feared cramp does not occur: he has been rehabilitated (p.205).

Far from being what Walter Ulbricht once called a 'sozialistische Menschengemeinschaft' based on the ideals of communism, the modest degree of community spirit in the GDR as portrayed here is founded on people's common experiences of fear and intimidation. More than one person tells Dallow that they too had "ein Bein im Zuchthaus" in their professions (p.79, p.84). The faceless Stasi agents, Schulze and Müller (so faceless that Dallow has difficulty in distinguishing one from the other), pretend to distance themselves from the bureaucracy of the state (of which they are an integral part) in order to create a bond with Dallow. They tell him: "Sie wissen ja, die Bürokratie will immer alles wissen" (p.46) and "Sie wissen ja, die Bürokratie hat nie genug Büros" (p.27). Thus the sense of the ridiculous is compounded in a situation where not only the general public is aligning itself against a common 'enemy', but also the agents of this 'enemy' are disclaiming any association with the

authorities as a tactic in order to establish trust and co-operation. Efforts to return the lost sheep to the flock are presented on a basis of self-interest for the individual, although comments such as “Sie brauchen Hilfe” (p.49) and “in Ihrem Interesse” (p.173) underline the state’s presumption in speaking on behalf of its citizens with an undertone of menace. They bear witness to the state’s fear of divergent views, and ultimately why the GDR had become such a stagnant society, incapable of reform. This paralysis is confirmed in the charge which puts Dallow in prison. “Verächtlichmachung führender Persönlichkeiten des Staates” (p.71) indicates that no satire was allowed and that the state was fundamentally uneasy about its own legitimacy.

The discrepancy between ideals and reality is confirmed in Hein’s portrayal of the situation of women in *Der Tangospieler*. As with *Der fremde Freund*, we encounter in Dallow’s family another example of a worried mother running around an elderly, sick father, living in the country, and a child who can relate to neither of them. Dallow’s mother serves her husband and son beer, schnapps and cigarettes as they sit on the veranda and then goes inside to prepare food (p.66). During Dallow’s second visit home, the passing of time is marked simply by the procession of meals prepared by his mother (p.183). Going home does not evoke memories of childhood, or lead to a description of his home, for instance. Dallow has cut himself off from this time and he simply concludes that he does not belong there (p.81). He feels relieved to reach the city again as this releases him from any sense of responsibility towards his parents (p.86). When he meets up with the writer of the incriminating tango text after their release, the latter’s moral decadence is compounded by the way in which he orders around his girlfriend without the slightest respect for her. Klufmann talks on behalf of his

partner and says that he is preparing her for her time as a student. She is at his mercy and revels in her role of serving him like a master (p.144). Dallow too invariably sees the women who appear in the text as potential sexual partners (Sylvia p.28, Elke p.111, various barmaids) or, in the case of Barbara - an older woman - a potential wife, should he ever decide to marry again (p.33).

### **FURTHER MODERNIST INFLUENCES**

The issue of the relationship between the individual and his/her society went to the heart of the work of a modernist like Camus. In the GDR, the process of challenging the cliché of a harmonious relationship between the two was delayed. The growing intellectual alienation of the middle 1960s was made explicit in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* by Christa Wolf. This book marked a change of focus away from calling on individuals to support their society towards a position of highlighting the way in which the individual can be neglected by the state. That it was due to be published in 1968 (even if the hesitation of the censorship authorities delayed its appearance until 1969) makes the setting for *Der Tangospieler* even more significant.

In addition to revealing the ways in which the individual is neglected by society, *Der Tangospieler* contains further modernist features which again suggest links to French influences. Dallow is often bored, a central element of modernist and existentialist work. He finds his own story of his prison experience boring. He tells his sister: “Ich habe diese Geschichte schon ein paarmal erzählen müssen. Und bevor ich sie das erstmal jemanden erzählte, habe ich sie erlebt. Und auch da hat sie mich schon gelangweilt” (p.83). Weeks pass after his release from prison before he picks up a newspaper and even then he reads the reports with

“gleichbleibender, wenn auch teilnahmsloser Aufmerksamkeit” (p.105). When Elke asks him whether he is bored during a birthday party for a colleague, he simply replies: “Nicht mehr als sonst” (p.160). Dallow tells his father that prison is just a way of killing time, but the member of the older generation cannot understand the preoccupation with boredom and such a lack of purpose. He just wants Dallow to find a job (p.67). Dallow experiences feelings of emptiness (p.21) and of being paralysed by his freedom (p.109, p.157). Hilary Wiesemann argues convincingly that this emphasis on a sense of boredom is reminiscent of Sartre’s characters. Roquentin, the protagonist from *La Nausée*, provides a good example.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from boredom, a sense of the absurd pervades the text, not only in terms of Dallow’s prison sentence for playing the piano accompaniment to a song which he had not read. Dallow may laugh at the absurdity of his life carrying on in a circle (p.111), but this does not prevent him from giving the ending of the story a sense of the absurd when he returns to his former workplace, having previously insisted that this would be tantamount to him signing his own prison sentence (p.177). The time framework adds to this sense of absurdity as the problem which had been painstakingly built up is resolved so quickly. Dallow does not need any time to reflect on the offer to return to the institute, a proposition which is made just a few pages before the end of the text. The first one hundred and eighty pages cover the first four months after Dallow’s release, indeed the first three days occupy fifty pages. The next three months are covered in merely twenty pages. The time scale speeds up when Dallow arrives on Hiddensee, the wider perspective neatly reflecting the sense of opening-up felt

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<sup>36</sup> Hilary Wiesemann, ‘*Ohne Hoffnung können wir nicht leben*’. *Atheist Modernism and Religion in the Works of Christoph Hein* (unpublished PhD Thesis) (University of Sheffield, 1998), p.100ff.



by Dallow at the coast. His crisis is then resolved overnight and in a matter of five pages.

Superficially at least, the story follows a traditional structure as it culminates in a neat resolution. If we ignore the narrator's critical distancing from Dallow, it may even appear as though Dallow acts as a socialist realist-style role model. Yet the speed of the conclusion acts almost as a parody of the ending we would normally associate with socialist realist literature where the protagonist ends the novel, after a journey of discovery, as an integrated member of society, in harmony with its ideals. Far from being a re-educated and dedicated member of the GDR society, Dallow is an opportunist with weak convictions. The film version of the book directed by Roland Gräf is more explicit in demonstrating that Dallow has not really solved his problem. It closes with the image of his hand shaking, just as it had at the start. (This is less extreme than the original plan however which involved Dallow returning to the institute with a Molotov cocktail. That such possibilities were considered in fact helps to emphasise the extent of Hein's understatement in the original text, which challenges expectations and refuses to fulfil hopes for an act of revenge.<sup>37</sup>)

In addition to the echo of Sartrean ennui, the link to Camus is again in evidence here in other aspects of Dallow's characterisation. Despite the difference in narrative point of view between a first and third-person approach, the focus in *Der Tangospieler* on a single male character and his casual relationships is

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<sup>37</sup> A similar instance of a director being more explicit with his ending than Hein's original text occurred in the premiere of Hein's play *Mutters Tag* at the Berliner Ensemble, on 16 October 2000. The script finishes with a Jewish author deciding to move to a flat higher up in the block of flats in which he is living out of fear of acts of vandalism on his ground floor flat. The production, however, ended with a stone coming through his window.

similar to *L'étranger*.<sup>38</sup> Claude Prévost mentions some parallels between Dallow and Meursault: Dallow, he says, has never been an active citizen or a rebel, he follows the path set out for him, and the spell he spends in prison is just an “accident” in his monotonous life.<sup>39</sup> The period in prison provides another link to *L'étranger* in that both characters have difficulty in accepting that they have been convicted in the name of an anonymous “people”. Dallow, as we have already seen, tells his judge: “Dazu hatten Sie kein Recht. Sie haben das Volk nicht befragt” (p.154). When Meursault is condemned to death in *L'étranger*, it is not the death sentence per se which strikes him, but, among other things, that the decision is taken in the name of “une notion aussi imprécise que le peuple français” (p.167).

A common feature shared by Meursault and Dallow is the pursuit of self-gratification free from moral concerns. The day after his mother's funeral, Meursault goes for a swim and meets a former acquaintance, Marie, whom he then invites to the cinema. She is subsequently surprised to see that he is wearing a black tie, and he explains that his mother had died the previous day:

Elle a eu un petit recul, mais n'a fait aucune remarque. J'ai eu envie de lui dire que ce n'était pas ma faute [...]. Le soir, Marie avait tout oublié. Le film était drôle par moments et puis vraiment trop bête. Elle avait sa jambe contre la mienne. Je lui caressais les seins. Vers la fin de la séance, je l'ai embrassée, mais mal. En sortant, elle est venue chez moi (p.35).

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<sup>38</sup> Page references in the text are to the 1990 folio paperback edition.

<sup>39</sup> Claude Prévost, 'Une carapace d'indifférence', *L'humanité*, 25 July 1990. Reprinted in German in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp.166-170.

The following weekend she asks him whether he loves her. He replies that this does not mean anything but that he does not think so. Dallow shows a similarly detached approach to relationships whilst he is on Hiddensee. He and his double sofa acquire quite a reputation among female visitors to the island as a convenient source of accommodation, on occasions for more than one guest at a time. As with Meursault, sexual encounters develop effortlessly:

Als von Elke die erste ausweichende Antwort auf seine Einladung, ihn auf der Insel zu besuchen, eintraf, ließ er häufiger Mädchen in seinem Zimmer nächtigen. Es kostete ihn keine Mühe und bedurfte keiner Überredungskünste, ein Mädchen für sein zweischläfriges Sofa zu finden. Alles, was er zu tun hatte, war lediglich, nicht nein zu sagen, wenn er nach einem Quartier gefragt wurde. [...] Ernsthafte Gespräche mit den Mädchen vermied er (p.196).

Dallow's distance from emotional reactions is a key feature of *Der Tangospieler* which not only links it to *Der fremde Freund* but also to Camus's work. Dallow has been in prison for nineteen months, twenty-one including custody, but his initial feelings on leaving prison are not of joy, liberation and hope. Rather than re-emerging into the world blinking and excited, Dallow seems distanced, both from the world around him and from his own emotions. The adjectives we encounter in the first pages of the story are "kalt", "schmutzig", "leer", "dreckig" (all p.7). The predominant colours are black and white. The waitress at the bar wears a white apron, Dallow's fingers are white (p.6), snow covers the ground and, looking from the train, the landscape is white (p.8). In his flat, the coffee looks darker than normal and there is a blackish white layer of fungus on his dustbin (p.10). Dallow's difficulty in finding his feet and his sense of detachment are mirrored by the fact that perceptions and feelings are

communicated through such verbs as “bemerken”, “registrieren” and “scheinen”, rather than “sein” or “spüren”. Dallow’s natural emotional response to a given stimulus is being impaired. Examples of this litter the opening pages of the story: “Als er bemerkte, daß der Waggon nicht geheizt war, stand er auf” (p.8); “Nach dem dritten Glas Wein bemerkte er eine Wirkung des Alkohols” (p.8); “Er registrierte auch, daß er ohne zu überlegen, für jedes Schloß den richtigen Schlüssel gewählt hatte” (see pp.8-10.). This linguistic distancing may have been unnecessarily vague and imprecise for some commentators’ taste,<sup>40</sup> but it does highlight the character’s distance from his feelings. Dallow generally does not feel, he notices. Although, as we saw in chapter 2, Meursault is more in touch with his sensual responses, there is a similar absence of emotional reaction in his behaviour. He does not, for example, describe his feelings on seeing his mother’s coffin and makes no attempt to communicate with the local mourners.

Apart from the obvious differences in temperature and environment, the opening scenes in *L’étranger* offer similar elemental contrasts to the initial scenes of *Der Tangospieler* already described. When Meursault arrives after his bus journey at the mortuary where his mother is being kept, he describes it as being a very bright, whitewashed room (p.13). A few pages later, night falls quickly, at which point bright lights are switched on, blinding Meursault: “Le soir était tombé brusquement. Très vite, la nuit s’était épaissie au dessus de la verrière. Le concierge a tourné le commutateur et j’ai été aveuglé par l’éclaboussement soudain de la lumière” (p.17). He continues: “L’éclat de la lumière sur les murs blancs me fatiguait” and a little later, when waking after having dozed for a while, states that “la pièce m’a paru encore plus éclatante de blancheur” (p.18).

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<sup>40</sup> See for instance Volker Hage, ‘Freiheit, mir graut’s vor dir’, *Die Zeit*, 24 March 1989.

When the funeral director arrives, Meursault notes his black tie, white collar, nose with black hairs, white hair, and pale face (p.26).

The action in *Der Tangospieler* predominantly takes place in bars, flats and offices. Dallow does not look for open spaces or light after his time in prison. In fact, he actively seeks darkness and is irritated by the daylight when he comes out of the matinee performance in a cinema (p.167). The sun and daylight which are Meursault's natural environment act as a challenge to Dallow to look his problems in the face, but he turns away for fear of being blinded. Immediately after telling himself that he has missed his chance not to return to his old life in the institute, he is dazzled by the low-lying September sun (p.205). Only when he is away from the greyness of his urban world, on holiday on Hiddensee, does Dallow find relief and a sense of freedom in the physical activity of swimming and bathing in the sun:

Er nahm stets Bücher mit, las aber selten mehr als ein paar Seiten. Er war ausreichend damit beschäftigt, zu schwimmen und sich von der Sonne wärmen zu lassen. Oder er sah auf das Meer hinaus, auf das wechselvolle Spiel der Wellen, auf die unendlichen und sich nie wiederholenden Bewegungen des Wassers. Dieser einfachen Vergnügungen wurde er nie müde (p.191).

The simplicity of the outdoor life on Hiddensee offers him a rare moment of calm (p.192). Meursault recalls his swimming expeditions primarily as opportunities for sexual encounters. It is only when he is in prison looking at the distant sea through the bars of his cell that he recalls the wider personal freedom it represented. Camus's own strong sense of this freedom comes over more

powerfully in *La peste* in the scene where Rieux's swim in the sea with his friend Tarrou represents a moment of escape from the ravages of the plague:

Les eaux se gonflaient et redescendaient lentement. Cette respiration calme de la mer faisait naître et disparaître des reflets huileux à la surface des eaux. Devant eux, la nuit était sans limites. Rieux, qui sentait sous ses doigts le visage grêlé des rochers, était plein d'un étrange bonheur (p.231).

Unlike Dallow, Meursault is not distanced from sensual reactions. Whilst the two characters are opposites to each other in this respect, the challenge posed to them by sensual stimuli remains the same. The difference is that Meursault, a brutally honest man, responds to the sun and his environment, whereas Dallow, a man who does not want to confront his problems, largely shies away from them. In doing so, he is able to retake his place in society rather than being expelled from it like Meursault.

## CONCLUSION

*Der Tangospieler* undeniably shares significant features with *Horns Ende* and with *Der fremde Freund* in particular. Dallow and Claudia are isolated characters and face the same challenge in confronting difficult experiences in their lives. All three stories challenge the propaganda image of the GDR as a 'sozialistische Menschengemeinschaft', with *Der Tangospieler* the most explicit about the menace behind the state's efforts to encourage individuals to find their place in society. Like *Der fremde Freund*, *Der Tangospieler* contains various echoes of the existential sense of alienation encapsulated by Camus's *L'étranger*. Whilst the claim that Hein has written the same book for the third

time is an exaggerated one then, broad elements of the context and content are indeed similar.

*Der Tangospieler* features a clear change of narrative perspective by Hein in that the story is told through a third-person narrator. This does not mean however that Hein is abandoning the non-didactic approach of his previous work. The narrator does not interfere in the story to push readers towards conclusions, and Dallow is neither condemned nor held up as a role model. The reader is left to form an independent view of his decision to retake his position in society. Furthermore, even though the story initially appears to have a traditional narrative style and structure, there is no natural denouement to the action. Indeed, the overtly neat ending of the story comes close to making *Der Tangospieler* a parody of the socialist realist novel.

Commentators have seen Dallow as a brother to Claudia from *Der fremde Freund* in terms of the problem he has as an individual in relating in any meaningful way to his social environment – a conflict at the heart of much European modernist literature. The position of the protagonist in relation to his society is a slightly different one here though compared to *Der fremde Freund*. Claudia's situation is shocking because her relationship to society has been fundamentally ruptured. The subtext of *Der fremde Freund* challenges the reader to produce a counter-response. Claudia had learnt to keep quiet in 1953, and, by the 1980s, she has retreated into her own world and tried to make herself invulnerable. We meet Dallow at an earlier point in his life and the GDR's history when there is still a chance for reform. Throughout the course of the book, this crucial opportunity is missed both by Dallow and his society. The

results of this failure were to become all too visible in the GDR just months after the publication of *Der Tangospieler*.

### **CLEARING THE DESK – EXEKUTION EINES KALBES**

Although it did not appear as a collection until the year after the publication of *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, the sixteen stories which make up *Exekution eines Kalbes* were written between 1977 and 1990. It would seem fair then to examine the collection at this point as it is essentially a pre-‘Wende’ body of work. As with Hein’s first collection of short stories, *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*, it consists of two longer stories and several shorter ones, with the title taken from the first story in the collection. Not only the length of the stories, but also the period of time they cover varies considerably. Within less than four pages, ‘Zur Frage der Gesetze’ crosses a fifty-year period. In contrast, ‘Exekution eines Kalbes’, sixty-six pages long, essentially takes place over a matter of months, apart from a brief introduction and conclusion which broaden the perspective by two years. A further similarity to his first collection is that the majority of the stories are set in twentieth-century Germany. Most of these take place in the GDR, with a strong emphasis on Berlin. Hein does not devote a subsection of the stories specifically to Berlin as he did in *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*, but we again find some brief stories, sometimes only a few pages long, set in the capital. Examples include ‘Der Krüppel’, ‘Eine Frage der Macht’ and ‘Der eine



hauet Silber, der andere rotes Gold'. 'Exekution eines Kalbes', 'Matzeln' and 'Ein sächsischer Tartüff' are located outside Berlin, but within the GDR. 'Moses Tod' is the only story which takes place outside Germany. Hein has not given precise details about when he wrote each of the stories, but has confirmed that, apart from the last story in the collection, which was written around the time of the 'Wende', they all originate from the GDR.<sup>41</sup> When asked about the reason for the delay in their publication, he contested speculation that some of the stories were only published in 1994 because they had previously been blocked by the censorship authorities in the GDR.<sup>42</sup>

#### **THEMATIC LINKS TO OTHER PROSE – 'SMALL' AND 'BIG' HISTORY**

Links to other prose works by Hein can be seen both in the thematic content and the narrative approach. As with all Hein's prose, *Exekution eines Kalbes* presents a world far from the image of a well-adjusted, harmonious society. Regional and family divisions are apparent. 'Matzeln' contains criticism by a miner in Erfurt of a petty-minded, bureaucratic gatekeeper from Brandenburg. This story also provides a similar illustration of the lack of communication between a husband and wife to the ones we saw in *Der fremde Freund* and *Horns Ende* (see especially p.128).

'Exekution eines Kalbes' is probably the best example of the tension between town and country worlds which had been evident in all of Hein's longer pre-'Wende' prose works. Paul Jastram, responsible for dairy cows in the local co-

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<sup>41</sup> Hein confirmed this to me at our meeting in Berlin in March 2002.

<sup>42</sup> A review of the collection *Exekution eines Kalbes* in *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 8 August 1994, for instance, claimed that the story 'Exekution eines Kalbes' must have been refused publication in 1977.

operative, clashes with the chairman of the co-operative Otto Küstriner, who had moved to the village over a decade earlier:

Der Vorsitzende nannte ihn einen hysterischen Kleinbürger, wie er aus der Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung sattem bekannt sei. [...] Jastram lachte auf. Auf die Frage, was er nun zu tun gedenke, antwortete er, schon in der Tür stehend: Ich gehe dorthin, wo du herkommst. Ich fahre in die Stadt und suche mir Arbeit (p.22).

The wife of the protagonist, Yvonne, heads for a night in the city without her husband, but soon regrets her decision and feels anxious whilst looking for her friends, until she recognises the familiar face of her sister-in-law Ev (p.45). If the city appears threatening, the portrayal of life in the country is not more positive. We witness not only normal instances of gossip, but also vengeance and abuse (see for example p.68). The real tension however can be found within the family. A communication breakdown, which contributes to marital infidelity, is apparent within the protagonist's family.

Throughout this and other stories in the collection, a lack of self-fulfilment emerges as the experience of most ordinary people: "Man lebte zufrieden; die Hoffnungen, die sich nicht erfüllt hatten, verloren sich in den Jahren, und die Arbeit ließ die Wünsche und Träume vergessen, die eine Jugend so ruhelos machen" (p.14). The descriptions of tense family life in this collection clearly provide links to other Hein works, particularly scenes from *Der fremde Freund* and *Der Tangospieler* when Claudia and Dallow return to their parents' homes in the countryside. Furthermore, 'Exekution eines Kalbes', like *Der Tangospieler*, opens with the protagonist leaving prison and departing on a train

journey. *Horns Ende* shares the theme of a man sent to work in the country, taking with him a wife who fails to settle there.

Hein generally gives the stories plain titles, unspecific to the setting, such as 'Der Name', 'Der Krüppel', 'Der Sohn' and 'Ein Exil'. Andreas Isenschmid criticised *Exekution eines Kalbes* for being a lifeless collection, claiming that readers can neither warm nor cool to the stories and thus cannot participate to the same extent as in the earlier longer pieces of prose.<sup>43</sup> Such an approach to the stories by Hein does not indicate an impersonal attitude towards characters, however. Indeed, as in *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*, the emphasis is in fact on the uniqueness of the characters' lives against the background of the 'bigger' historical developments. In 'Exekution eines Kalbes', Sawetzki's capture (whilst attempting to flee the Eastern bloc to Turkey during a visit to Bulgaria), prison sentence and subsequent release are mentioned at the beginning and end of the story, but do not pervade the narrative. These are doubtless the moments which would dominate a superficial account of his life, but this story focuses instead on the day-to-day nature of his life. 'Der Name' takes as its context the Nazi policy of forcing Jews to adopt an easily recognisable Jewish name. The emphasis of the story is placed on the personal reaction of one lady who simply wishes that the Nazis had given her a nicer one than Sara. Miriam, for example.

In 'Die Vergewaltigung', the consequences of playing down small history for the sake of big history become apparent. At the start of the story, a German grandmother is raped by soldiers of the Red Army. The female protagonist, the granddaughter, similarly to other characters in Hein's prose writing, suppresses

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<sup>43</sup> Andreas Isenschmid, 'Nachrichten vom beschädigten Leben', *Die Zeit*, 18 March 1994.

her memories (in this case of what the soldiers had done to her grandmother) and places her faith in the SED. When this confidence in the state is questioned by her husband, who suggests that she is taking a one-sided view of her life and neglecting personal elements such as the rape of her grandmother, the world which she has built for herself crumbles, leaving her feeling exposed and helpless.

One of the ways in which Hein brings the personal stories of individuals to the fore is by stressing the continuity of lives across history and political systems. He returns to the theme raised in the story 'Die Witwe eines Maurers' in the *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* collection, in which the widow receives a state pension under several different political systems in twentieth-century Germany. In the *Exekution eines Kalbes* collection, the story 'Zur Frage der Gesetze' shows the way in which many of the laws in twentieth-century Germany did not change across the various political administrations. A doctor who carries out illegal abortions contravenes the same paragraph of the criminal code of the Weimar Republic, Nazi Germany and the GDR. In 'Exekution eines Kalbes' the mother's advice goes unheeded by Sawetzki and his wife. This is a vital missed opportunity as, in her old age, she is able to spot the thread of continuity which runs through the family:

Die Mutter [...] erschrak darüber, wie gleichartig Vater und Sohn waren in ihrem Charakter [...] so daß sie, der mit den Jahren das frühere Leben immer gegenwärtiger wurde, verschiedene Male den Sohn mit dem Vornamen seines Vaters anredete (p.33).

## NARRATIVE APPROACHES

As in *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*, Hein writes from a variety of narrative standpoints here. In the previous collection, he produced a number of stories in the style of a report, where entire lives are recounted in a cool, distant tone. Such examples can again be found in this collection. 'Ein Exil', 'Eine Frage der Macht', 'Der eine hauet Silber, der andere rotes Gold', 'Der Name' and 'Der Krüppel' are all narrated by a non-intrusive third-person voice. These stories generally have a strong structure and culminate in a key moment in a life, be it a departure, a return home after a long absence, or a death. "In der Nacht starb sie an einem Infarkt. Auf ihrem Grabstein steht der Name Anna Kozower" ('Der Name'), "Eisele und seine Familie sahen sich nie wieder" ('Der Krüppel'), "Ein Jahr später, am 12. Mai, starb er, auf dem Heimweg von einer Nachtschicht, frühmorgens in einer Straßenbahn" ('Zur Frage der Gesetze'), "Seinen früheren Dozenten und Seminargruppenbetreuer Dr. Edwin Schulze sah und sprach Michael Kapell nie wieder" ('Unverhofftes Wiedersehen').<sup>44</sup>

The latter of these stories takes a modified narrative approach in that the narrator clearly intervenes in the story, adding information for the reader:

Dr. Edwin Schulze verteilte anschließend hektografierte Blätter, auf denen die Unterzeichner sich zu einem zweijährigen Dienst in der Freiwilligen-Armee – eine allgemeine Wehrpflicht wurde erst nach dem Bau der Berliner Mauer eingeführt – bereit erklärten und die von den Studenten nur noch zu unterschreiben waren (p.102).

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<sup>44</sup> This final story, like 'Nachtfahrt und früher Morgen' from *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*, takes as its theme an attempt to leave the GDR. In both, this element of the story remains in the background; a personal relationship predominates.

‘Exekution eines Kalbes’ also has an external narrator directing the slow pace of the story, which mirrors the rhythm of life in the country:

Die Lage war also überaus mißlich: die Genossenschaft erhielt kein Geld, da der Schlachthof das Vieh nicht abnahm, die zurückgewiesenen Rinder fraßen Futter, welches man der nächsten Generation zur Mast hätte geben müssen, und – und dies vor allem ist für unsere Geschichte von Bedeutung – sie beanspruchten Stallplätze, so daß die Jungtiere nicht umgesetzt werden konnten und unter der Obhut der Brigade Gotthold Sawetzki verblieben. [...] Der Sommer war vergangen, und der Oktober kam und ging, und es war November geworden (p.20).

Despite the thematic and narrative links to *Der Tangospieler* already mentioned, the input of the narrator in this story is more obvious. The narrative in fact bears a resemblance to *Horns Ende* in that, although the narration is conducted in the third person, it goes through a range of figures and standpoints. Characters are introduced in sequence and the text adopts their respective focus for the subsequent pages, such as Sawetzki (p.11), Otto Küstriner (p.23), Paul Jastram (p.30), Yvonne (p.36) and Hermann Weiprecht (p.46).

‘Ein sächsischer Tartüff’ goes further than both of these in terms of the narrator’s presence. It opens with the comment: “Diese dumme Geschichte, um mit Dostojewski zu sprechen [...]” (p.73), and repeats this style when the story is commentated by an external narrator at other points in the text: “Nun sollte die Geschichte zu Ende gehen” (p.75) and “Unsere Geschichte könnte wirklich enden” (p.76). Whilst this has a traditional feel to it, the presence of the narrator does not necessarily mean that a clear resolution occurs at the end of the text. The final paragraph may begin: “Und so lebten sie alle in Frieden [...]”, but a

twist is added in that Kurt Pappke is described as being an exception to this: “Ungewiß aber bleibt, ob er nicht allein darum verärgert war, weil Lina Pappke angesichts der ergrauten Männlichkeit gelacht hatte” (p.79).

A degree of mystery is also present in the endings of ‘Matzeln’ (“Und während ich an der Theke mein Mittagessen bezahlte, warteten meine zufälligen Tischgenossen noch immer verdrossen auf den Vorsitzenden ihrer mir rätselhaft gebliebenen Innung” [p.130]) and ‘Ein älterer Herr, federleicht’. ‘Matzeln’ contrasts with the other stories in that it is recounted by a character involved in the action, who recalls a story he overhears in a pub. The narrative style here is reminiscent of ‘Charlottenburger Chaussee, 11. August’ from *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* where the narrator recounts a story told by a philosopher. Only one story is recounted purely through a first-person perspective. ‘Die Krücke’ is narrated by a boy in a loose monologue which bears a resemblance to a stream of consciousness. In contrast to many of the third-person accounts, it ends virtually in mid-sentence: “Was soll ich tun, denn ich will nicht mehr stehlen” (p.119). ‘Moses Tod’ is written in biblical-style language: “Als Jahwe ihn auf den Berg Nebo schickte, auf daß er von dort aus das gute Land sehe” (p.120). This is similar to the way in which Hein writes to a linguistic discipline in ‘Die russischen Briefe des Jägers Johann Seifert’ in the *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* collection.

As with the first collection, the traditions of chronicle writing in German literature pervade the text. Whereas Hein took a short story by Kleist as the foundation for a story in the first collection (‘Der neuere (glücklichere) Kohlhaas. Bericht über einen Rechtshandel aus den Jahren 1972/73’), here he

borrowed a title from Hebel, 'Unverhofftes Wiedersehen'. The shorter stories in the collection in particular bear similarities to Kleist and Hebel chronicles with their distant narrative voice and cool tone. Gustav Seibt summed up the primary source of influence on this collection when he wrote in his review: "Es gibt sie noch, die alte deutsche Erzählkunst".<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSION

A review by Karim Saab, included in the Reclam *Jahresüberblick* review of 1994, described Hein as "überschätzt und überfordert", and regarded *Exekution eines Kalbes* as a "peinliche Neuerscheinung" which provided further evidence (after *Das Napoleon-Spiel*) of Hein's literary decline.<sup>46</sup> Irrespective of one's view of the literary quality of this collection, it is of course difficult to draw conclusions about developments in Hein's writing from it as the stories' date of origin are unclear. I would argue however that it is undeserving of such a harsh response. It consolidates and provides links to Hein's work up to this point. These links could be interpreted as trial runs for longer prose projects, although they are generally successful sketches in their own right. As a collection, it is a little disappointing in that it is not attempting to provide a new departure.

There is a sense that Hein was 'tidying up his desk' with this publication. Peter Jakobs wrote in an article under the heading 'Er hat eben mal aufgeräumt...': "Wenn die Sachen noch länger gelegen hätten, wäre vielleicht nie etwas daraus geworden".<sup>47</sup> Like the first collection, which launched his career as a prose writer in 1980, it generally relies on external narrative voices, whilst at the same

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<sup>45</sup> Gustav Seibt, 'Krach in der Mastrinderbrigade', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 February 1994.

<sup>46</sup> Karim Saab, 'Überschätzt und überfordert', *Märkische Allgemeine*, 28 January 1994. Reprinted in Frank Josef Görtz, Volker Hage and Uwe Wittstock (eds), *Deutsche Literatur 1994. Jahresüberblick* (Stuttgart, 1995), pp.155-159.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Jakobs, 'Er hat eben mal aufgeräumt...', *Die Welt*, 5 March 1994.



time including a degree of variety in terms of the input by the narrator, amount of dialogue in the text and the extent of closure in the endings. Thematically, Hein again brings to the fore the relationship between 'big' and 'small' history. Big events on a political level leave an indelible mark on individual lives, especially in twentieth-century Berlin. Ultimately, however, they cannot tell the whole story.

## CHAPTER 5

“Christoph Hein hat wie kein zweiter Schriftsteller aus der DDR das begleitet und befördert, kommentiert und kritisiert, was vielleicht etwas zu eifrig als ‘Revolution’ bezeichnet worden ist”.<sup>1</sup>

Hein and the ‘Wende’

### INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the subsequent end of the GDR provides a caesura in a study of Hein’s prose of the 1980s and 1990s. This was the time when Hein’s commitment to a public role beyond his literature became most pronounced, therefore meriting separate analysis here. There is certainly no shortage of speeches and interviews by Hein from the autumn of 1989. Many of these have since been collected in the anthologies *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*,<sup>2</sup> *Die Mauern von Jerichow*<sup>3</sup> and *Die fünfte Grundrechenart*.<sup>4</sup> Baier<sup>5</sup> and Hammer<sup>6</sup> also provide useful material about this period. I will draw on these sources substantially in this chapter. In addition to examining Hein’s

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<sup>1</sup> Volker Hage, ‘Zur deutschen Literatur 1989’ in Franz Josef Görtz, Volker Hage and Uwe Wittstock (eds), *Deutsche Literatur 1989. Jahresüberblick* (Stuttgart, 1990), pp.5-41, here p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* (Berlin and Weimar, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Christoph Hein, *Die Mauern von Jerichow* (Berlin and Weimar, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Christoph Hein, *Die fünfte Grundrechenart* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft. Christoph Hein. Ein Arbeitsbuch. Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie* (Berlin and Weimar, 1992).

activities at the end of 1989, I will look beyond the 'Wende' into the early 1990s to analyse Hein's response to the collapse of the GDR.

#### AUTUMN 1989 AND SPRING 1990

As the popular protests gained momentum in the GDR in the early autumn of 1989, Hein was very aware that intellectuals would have to contribute actively to the debate, rather than hiding away and trying to appear wise after the event. Whilst the sheer speed of developments meant that he and other GDR intellectuals did not always have time to produce well-reflected responses, Hein was not paralysed or deterred from making public appearances and statements. His attitude is neatly encapsulated in the following appeal to his colleagues in a speech under the title 'Die fünfte Grundrechenart' at the Berlin branch of the GDR Writers' Union on 14 September:

Wir werden eines Tages die Frage zu beantworten haben: 'Wo wart Ihr eigentlich damals? Wo zeigte sich Eure Haltung? Wo blieb Euer - und sei's noch so ohnmächtiges - Wort?' Und dann wird uns keine noch so kluge und geschickte Antwort vor der Scham schützen können, wenn wir heute noch immer schweigen.<sup>7</sup>

In this speech, which I intend to take as the starting point to an analysis of this period, Hein admitted to the emotional pain he was suffering due to the failure of the GDR to keep its citizens. His comment: "Es macht mich krank, in einer Stadt zu wohnen, aus der sich immer wieder Mitbürger mit einem Lebewohl statt mit einem Aufwiedersehen verabschieden" (later picked up in *Von allem Anfang an* where the protagonist Daniel recounts whispered farewells in his East

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<sup>7</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Die fünfte Grundrechenart', *Die Zeit*, 6 October 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.145-156, here p.155.

German home during the 1950s [see page 29]) may come as a surprise to Hein's readers who are used to less emotional responses from the author. The timing of the speech was significant too, as Reinhard Andress has pointed out: "Hein war einer der ersten DDR-Schriftsteller, die sich zu einem Zeitpunkt, als Erich Honecker noch der mächtigste Mann im Staat war, zur ernsten Lage in der DDR äußerten".<sup>8</sup> Emmerich describes it as a courageous speech.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the autumn, Hein's public statements emphasised the need for a focus on practical work. On 24 October, he spoke at a seminar under the title 'DDR - wie ich sie träume' at the 'Haus der Jungen Talente' in Berlin. Here he began by clearly stating his political preference: "Ich wünsche mir, daß aus der DDR ein sozialistisches Land wird"<sup>10</sup> before elaborating on his perception of the fundamental problem in the GDR, namely, that it had not succeeded in overcoming the structures of Stalinism. Whilst not wanting to play down the significance of the protests which had begun in the GDR, Hein sounded a cautionary note to his audience, based on his experiences of other moments in the GDR's history when reform had been promised. He confessed: "Ich habe Angst, daß von diesen wunderbaren Tagen [...] wenig übrig bleibt, wenn wir jetzt nur moralische Forderungen erheben". A few days later, Hein repeated his call for a reform of his society's structures in a speech to the packed 'Erlöser-Kirche' in Berlin.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Reinhard Andress, 'Christoph Heins Weg durch den Herbst 1989' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft*, pp.158-172, here p.158.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), p.271.

<sup>10</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Ein Berliner Traum im Oktober 1989, der im August 1968 von deutschen Panzern auf dem Prager Wenzelsplatz überrollt wurde', *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.167-168, here p.167.

<sup>11</sup> A photo on page 116 of Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder* shows Hein sitting in the church with Ulrich Plenzdorf, Heiner Müller, Stephan Hermlin and Günter de Bruyn.

In a public declaration on 15 October, Hein announced that he would urge the government for as long as necessary to set up an independent commission to investigate allegations that state security officers had used excessive force at recent demonstrations.<sup>12</sup> Such a commission was subsequently founded with Hein sitting as a member. Hein has since been candid about the commission's lack of success. In an interview with *Junge Welt*, he openly acknowledged the lack of power at the commission's disposal due to the fact that it was not a parliamentary inquiry in which the refusal to give testimony could be punished.<sup>13</sup> In the commission's report, Hein described the frustration of dealing with state officials who claimed not to be able to remember events at the time.<sup>14</sup> Despite these drawbacks, the courage involved in participating in the commission should not be underestimated. Commission members' fears that they could find themselves in a dangerous situation if the SED were to re-establish authority were very real, as Hein noted.<sup>15</sup>

On 29 October, *Der Spiegel* printed an interview with Hein, who, like virtually everyone else, did not sense momentum towards reunification in Germany at this time. He stated:

Ich denke, die DDR-Bürger, mich eingeschlossen, fahren vielleicht lieber mal durch Rom oder Paris. Der Wunsch, durchs Brandenburger Tor zu

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<sup>12</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Öffentliche Erklärung', *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.157-158, here p.157.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Frank Schumann, 'Wer heute so laut schreit, soll sagen, was er früher tat', *Junge Welt*, 12 December 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.208-214, here p.211.

<sup>14</sup> Daniela Dahn and Fritz-Jochen Kopka, *Und diese verdammte Ohnmacht. Report der Untersuchungskommission zu den Ereignissen vom 7. und 8. Oktober 1989 in Berlin* (Berlin, 1991). This contains a foreword and a statement by Hein dated 29 November 1989 on the progress of the commission's work, as well as transcripts of the commission's sessions.

<sup>15</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Ein Brief an Sara, New York', *New York Times Magazine*, 17 December 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.184-198, here p.195.

fahren, ist, glaube ich, sekundär. Es ist also nicht die Wiedervereinigung.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, Hein appeared rather disparaging of the people who were seeking to leave the GDR at this point. In contrast to his earlier remarks about the loss of GDR citizens sickening him, he argued in an interview which appeared in the *Berliner Zeitung* on 4 November that “die Leute, die jetzt noch gehen, nicht Reformen vermissen, sondern ein größeres Auto”.<sup>17</sup>

On the same day that this interview appeared in the *Berliner Zeitung*, Hein gave his most famous speech of this period at the demonstration organised by the ‘Verband der Kulturschaffenden der DDR’ at Berlin’s Alexanderplatz.<sup>18</sup> Before an audience of 500,000 “mündig gewordene Mitbürger”, Hein again referred to the structural changes which would be needed for the GDR to become democratic and genuinely socialist, something to which he saw no alternative. His emphasis was on reforming the GDR to achieve real socialism, “einen Sozialismus, der dieses Wort nicht zur Karikatur macht”. He warned against seductive euphoria and complacency: “Die Kuh ist noch nicht vom Eis”. Hard and complicated work - “schlimmer als Stricken” - would be needed in order to produce the desired practical results.

Hein shared a platform with prominent GDR writers and intellectuals, such as Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller, at the Alexanderplatz demonstration. He

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Hartmut Palmer and Ulrich Schwarz, ‘Die DDR ist nicht China’, *Der Spiegel* 29 October 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.159-166, here p.166.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Dieter Krebs, ‘Weder das Verbot noch die Genehmigung als Geschenk’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 4/5 November 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.178-183, here p.182.

<sup>18</sup> Christoph Hein, ‘Der alte Mann und die Straße’, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.175-177.

maintained this solidarity with other GDR writers by signing the appeal 'Fassen Sie Vertrauen!' which was read on television by Christa Wolf the day before the Berlin Wall fell. It urged citizens to stay in the GDR in order to make a contribution to building a truly democratic society, retaining the vision of democratic socialism. By the end of November however, Hein had broken away from intellectual-led appeals for citizens to remain in the GDR and work for reform. He did not sign the appeal 'Für unser Land' which offered an 'either/or' scenario for GDR citizens of either insisting on the autonomy of the GDR and attempting to develop a society based on solidarity, or accepting a take-over by the West. He told Klaus Hammer:

Ich war gegen diesen Appell und habe auch versucht, ihn zu verhindern. Die Mauer war geöffnet, da war die Reform der DDR vorbei. [...] Nach dem 9. November, mit dem Fall der Mauer, war überhaupt keine Bereitschaft mehr da. Ich war deshalb zu dem Zeitpunkt nicht mehr bereit, einen solchen Appell mitzutragen.<sup>19</sup>

Hein has stressed that it was not an attempt to seek popularity which motivated him not to sign. He simply thought that the time for such appeals had come and gone:

Ich habe diesen Appell 'Für unser Land' nicht unterschrieben, ich war dagegen, aber nicht, weil er keine Chance hatte, siegreich zu sein. Ich möchte auf meiner Seite stehen, nicht auf der siegreichen. Es interessiert

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, 'Dialog ist das Gegenteil von Belehren' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft*, pp.11-50, here p.42. This interview is misleading in that it states that Hein had refused to sign both of the November appeals. Hammer repeats this claim in his chronology of Hein's life. Hein does not correct Hammer in this respect, but only refers to the later appeal in his answer.

mich überhaupt nicht, etwas zu sagen, was sich ein halbes Jahr später als richtig erweist.<sup>20</sup>

His disdain for populist responses to the 'Wende' was highlighted in his reaction to the reception of his play *Die Ritter der Tafelrunde*, which had premiered in Dresden in April. Hein sadly noted after the premiere at Schwerin on 17 November: "Die Inszenierung hat mit meinem Stück nur noch wenig zu tun. Das sind Dummheiten, gegen die man wenig ausrichten kann, zumal wenn sie vom Beifall des Publikums scheinbar sanktioniert werden".<sup>21</sup> He was referring to the changes to the script which the director had made in order to render it more relevant to the events of the day. Hein's distaste for the applause this produced is obvious. His speech at Alexanderplatz had also testified to his refusal to make populist gestures as he adopted a conciliatory tone towards Erich Honecker. Hein stated that he did not think the GDR was by any means the fulfilment of Honecker's dream for his society. He adopted this tone as a warning "daß nicht auch wir jetzt Strukturen schaffen, denen wir eines Tages hilflos ausgeliefert sind".<sup>22</sup>

Yet although Hein did not sign the appeal 'Für unser Land', he was not totally resigned to a take-over by West Germany in late 1989 either. On 20 November, in a letter to the Rowohlt Verlag, he asserted: "Es gibt eine Chance für unsere Hoffnung, allerdings ist es die erste und gleichzeitig die letzte. Wenn wir scheitern, frißt uns McDonald".<sup>23</sup> This sense of opportunity is admittedly

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<sup>20</sup> Günter Grass, Ulrich Greiner, Volker Hage, Christoph Hein, 'Es gibt sie längst, die neue Mauer', *Die Zeit*, 7 February 1992. Reprinted in Franz Josef Görtz, Volker Hage and Uwe Wittstock (eds), *Deutsche Literatur 1991. Jahresüberblick* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp.260-271, here p.264. This states that the interview took place on 28 September 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Ein Brief an Sara, New York', *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.196.

<sup>22</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Der alte Mann und die Straße', *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.176.

<sup>23</sup> Christoph Hein, 'An den Rowohlt-Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg', *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.199-200, here p.200.



tempered by a growing awareness of offensive features of the GDR, for Hein undoubtedly made some unpleasant discoveries at this time. In his work on the commission examining the allegations of Stasi violence, Hein was shown (unfulfilled) plans to apply 'the Chinese solution' (i.e. the violent suppression of the Tieneman Square demonstrations in June that year) to the demonstrations in the GDR. His diary entry for 20 November notes: "Die chinesische Lösung des Problems war geplant". The entry concludes with the recognition that "Wir haben in einem Land gelebt, das wir erst jetzt kennenlernen".<sup>24</sup> But the element of hope in his statements in late November and December is unmistakable and somewhat curious given his refusal to sign the 'Für unser Land' appeal. On 4 December 1989, Hein wrote:

Zum erstenmal, nach mehr als vierzig Jahren, kann ich sagen: Dieses Land hier wird mein Land. Es wird mein Land, wenn ich es nicht aufgebe! [...] Endlich haben wir eine Chance. Wir haben sie erst jetzt. Und wir sollten sie - da wir sie endlich erkämpft haben - für uns nutzen und sie nicht vertun.<sup>25</sup>

His hope was that a more humane society than the GDR or the Federal Republic would develop in Germany, which could in turn provide a basis for a peaceful future in Europe. To a certain extent, this was a sceptical optimism, something which Hein had admitted as early as October in his interview with *Der Spiegel*.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the final weeks of 1989 and into 1990, Hein was nonetheless resolute in challenging the supremacy of the capitalist West. In December 1989, for example, he warned of the continued threats to GDR citizens who thought

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<sup>24</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Ein Brief an Sara, New York', *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.198.

<sup>25</sup> Gustav Just, *Zeuge in eigener Sache - Die fünfziger Jahre in der DDR*. [Mit einem Vorwort von Christoph Hein] (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), p.12.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Hartmut Palmer and Ulrich Schwarz, 'Die DDR ist nicht China' in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.160.

they had found the solution to all of their problems in the West. In his laudatio to Max Frisch, he asserted that a dragon may have been defeated in the GDR, but “schon lauern andere Gefahren auf uns, andere Drachen, freundlichere, buntere, die uns großen Konsum verheißen [...]. Die Ellbogengesellschaft [...] ist nicht meine Hoffnung für mein Land”.<sup>27</sup> Hein was still in favour of a two-state Germany at this point. He told *Junge Welt*: “Ich habe die Hoffnung, daß sie [die Zweistaatlichkeit] bestehen bleibt. Es ist die Chance für unseren eigenen Weg. Allerdings ist die Chance dafür zur Zeit sehr klein”.<sup>28</sup> He also favoured an attempt to create true socialism in Germany, whilst again acknowledging that the chances of this were small: “Es ist uns jetzt die große Chance gegeben, auf deutschem Boden erstmals wirklich Sozialismus aufzubauen. Dabei ist bei einem großen Teil der Bevölkerung schon eine gewisse Unlust zu beobachten”.<sup>29</sup>

Moving into 1990, Hein became increasingly convinced that the necessary support for another socialist experiment was lacking. In January, at an event marking the one hundredth anniversary of Kurt Tucholsky’s birth, he quoted the journalist and author: “Man kann für eine Majorität kämpfen, die von einer tyrannischen Minderheit unterdrückt wird. Man kann aber einem Volke nicht das Gegenteil von dem predigen, was es in seiner Mehrheit will”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Christoph Hein, ‘Achtung, Abgründe! Laudatio für Max Frisch’, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.240-250, here p.249.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Frank Schumann, ‘Wer heute so laut schreit, soll sagen, was er früher tat’ in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.213.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Irmtraud Gutschke, ‘Ich bin ein Schreiber von Chroniken’, *Neues Deutschland*, 2/3 December 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.201-207, here p.205.

<sup>30</sup> Christoph Hein, ‘Ein bißchen laut. Für Kurt Tucholsky’, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.251-264, here p.260.

Shortly after this, in March (i.e. around the time of the 'Volkskammer' elections in which the conservative 'Allianz für Deutschland' triumphed), Hein was no longer talking of hope and opportunities to create socialism in Germany. The GDR, Hein says, has conceded defeat to the Federal Republic:

Die Selbständigkeit der DDR ist hier verludert und vertan worden – und nicht durch die Schuld Westdeutschlands. Dieses marode System hier hat keine Chance, aufrecht und mit Würde eine Vereinigung herbeizuführen. Es wird deshalb auch kein Agreement geben, sondern eine Übernahme durch die BRD. In der DDR ist von Selbstbehauptung gar nicht die Rede. Da geht es um die Übergabe an die BRD - auf den Knien und mit der weißen Flagge.<sup>31</sup>

In May 1990, at a speech given on the occasion of his winning the Erich Fried prize, Hein soberly took stock of the reasons behind the collapse of GDR, but at the same time warned that the triumph of capitalism did not represent the end of history. Similar claims, he said, had been made about the GDR.<sup>32</sup> He also wrote a parable text 'No Sea Route to India' for *Time*<sup>33</sup> in response to its survey of GDR writers about the role they had played there. Hein described the development of the GDR in terms of a ship's journey in this text. He wrote 'sine ira et studio' about the role of the ship's captain and the writers on board the ships which had set out to find a sea route to India, a paradise on the other side of the ocean. The voyage, he writes, got off to a bad start as only a few people were really convinced of the vision of the captain. Hein describes the tactics

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Sigrid Löffler, 'Die Idee des europäischen Hauses ist gestorben', *profil*, 11/12 March 1990. Reprinted as 'Die alten Themen habe ich noch, jetzt kommen neue dazu' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*, pp.37-44, here p.44.

<sup>32</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Unbelehrbarsein ist die Pflicht des Intellektuellen', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 25 May 1990. Reprinted as 'Unbelehrbar – Erich Fried. Rede zur Verleihung des Erich-Fried-Preises' in Christoph Hein, *Die Mauern von Jerichow*, pp.46-63.

<sup>33</sup> Christoph Hein, 'No Sea Route to India', *Time*, 25 June 1990. Reprinted as 'Kein Seeweg nach Indien' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*, pp.13-19.

used by the captain to keep control of his ships, such as employing spies and even spilling blood. As in his Alexanderplatz speech, Hein does not wholly condemn the captain of the ship. Instead, he describes the captain's horror when he realises one day that he too has stopped seeking the promised land and lost sight of his original vision:

An diesem Morgen hatte er das Gefühl, um Jahrzehnte zu altern. Mit zitternden Knien kletterte er von der Brücke. Und die Mannschaft, die ihn wie jeden Tag mutlos und mürrisch fragte, wann sie denn endlich das gelobte Land erreichen, sahen nun einen hilflosen und verängstigten Greis.

As for the writers on the voyage, some had supported the captain, some had been critical. But, at the end of the voyage, they could smile when asked if the voyage had been a waste of time, for they had been needed on the ships and they had at least had an enriching experience: "Denn alles, was man braucht, zum Leben und zum Schreiben, sind Liebe und Erfahrungen".

Such a calm and considered approach to the end of the GDR and the role of the writers there was certainly absent in the 'Literaturstreit' which dominated the second half of 1990 following the publication of *Was bleibt* by Christa Wolf. Here, critics and writers argued about whether Wolf had in fact been a kind of 'Staatsdichterin' and was subsequently trying to slip into the role of a victim of the state.<sup>34</sup> Hein was not directly involved in this dispute, apart from defending Wolf in one interview.<sup>35</sup> As we shall see, he also gave an interview in the later

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<sup>34</sup> See for instance Karl Deiritz and Hannes Krauss (eds), *Der deutsch-deutsche Literaturstreit oder "Freunde, es spricht sich schlecht mit gebundener Zunge". Analysen und Materialien* (Hamburg/Zurich, 1991) or Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, pp.464-469.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Christoph Funke, '3. Oktober – auch ein Verdienst Christa Wolfs', *Der Morgen*, 29/30 September 1990.

phase of the row when information about Wolf's work as an 'Inoffizielle Mitarbeiterin' for the Stasi emerged. For much of the second half of 1990, however, Hein appears to have retreated from playing a prominent role in the public eye.

For several commentators, the fact that Hein refused to make a definitive break with socialism after the fall of the Berlin Wall undermined his criticism of Stalinism. Fernand Hoffmann argued: "Weil Christoph Hein diese Hoffnung nicht aufgeben will, ist seine Kritik am Stalinismus entweder ein Lippenbekenntnis oder aber jedenfalls ein Schuß ins Leere".<sup>36</sup> Eckhard Thiele was similarly critical of Hein in this respect. He argued that whilst Hein could justifiably be regarded as a critic of Stalinism in the GDR in his works such as *Der fremde Freund* and *Horns Ende*, several of his statements around the time of the 'Wende' were indicative of another attempt to realise a socialist model of society, which, given that there was no majority support for this, would ultimately mean another "stalinistische[r] Gewaltakt".<sup>37</sup> A further example of criticism of Hein can be found in an article in *The Modern Language Review* in which William Niven wrote:

If certain formulations and a tendency towards rhetorical pathos in Hein's speeches after October 1989 betray a linguistic solidarity with SED-style official jargon and oratory, there are moments where the actual content of his statements suggests that he is not so much a representative of the reform movement as an apologist of the SED and even MfS.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Fernand Hoffmann, 'Die mißverstandene Hoffnung. Der DDR-Regimekritiker Christoph Hein' in Wolfgang Seibel (ed.), *Stimmen der Zeit* (Freiburg, 1992), pp.321-332, here p.326.

<sup>37</sup> Eckhard Thiele, 'Engagiert – wofür? Zu Christoph Heins öffentlichen Erklärungen nach der "Wende" in der DDR' in Frauke Meyer-Gosau (ed.), *Christoph Hein* [Text und Kritik 111] (Munich, 1991), pp.74-80, here p.80.

<sup>38</sup> William Niven, "'Das Geld ist nicht der Gral': Christoph Hein and the 'Wende'", *The Modern Language Review*, 3/1995, pp.688-706, here p.693.

Niven continues: "Again and again he balances criticism of the East with a barbed criticism of the West that suggests that true cultural and moral values are in greater danger there than in the East".

Gustav Just, on the other hand, stressed his support for Hein maintaining a critical perspective. In September 1990, when taking stock of Hein's position, he wrote:

Das Volk hat anders entschieden, als es sich viele Intellektuelle erträumten, hüben und drüben. Bei manchen Anlaß zu Resignation, nostalgischem Nachtrauern. Nicht bei Christoph Hein. Er weiß, wie viele im ganzen Deutschland, daß mit dieser hastigen, überhasteten Vereinigung die Geschichte nicht zu Ende ist. Auch das vereinigte Deutschland, und erst recht dieses vergrößerte Deutschland, braucht kritische Geister wie Christoph Hein, die immer den Finger auf die wunde Stelle legen und wenigstens um einen Tag vorausdenken. Keine Ordnung kann so gut sein, daß sie nicht besser werden könnte und müßte. Gerechter. Menschlicher.<sup>39</sup>

Cynical observers may interpret Hein's hopes around the time of the 'Wende' that reform could have been possible as naïve. But to condemn Hein for harbouring these hopes and suggest that they undermine his earlier criticism of Stalinism seems even more naïve. The criticism from some of the commentators here is extremely harsh, especially given Hein's work on the Stasi investigation committee, not to mention the literature he had produced in the GDR. Hein certainly showed a wariness towards the West. But this should only come as a surprise to those who had mistaken his far from idealistic portrayal of society in

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<sup>39</sup> Gustav Just, 'Er speiste nie an der Tafel der Mächtigen' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*, pp.188-191, here p.191.

his prose as being solely related to the GDR. Hein was clearly a convinced socialist who would inevitably have had strong reservations about Western society. His conciliatory and cautious tone did not meet the expectations of these commentators who, it may be assumed, had anticipated a more dismissive approach to the GDR from Hein. As we shall see in his post-‘Wende’ work, however, he was not prepared to play their game.

### THE CHANGE TO WRITERS’ ROLE IN POST-‘WENDE’ GERMANY

A central aspect of the ‘Literaturstreit’ of 1990 was the role which writers were expected to fulfil in society. Hein’s diary of November 1989 reveals the burden he felt his public role had imposed on him, especially around the time of the ‘Wende’: “Die DDR-Zeitungen [...] drängen auf Interviews, mehrere Verlage verlangen jetzt Manuskripte. In den vergangenen Jahren ließen sie mich in Ruhe arbeiten. Eine kostbare Ruhe ist dahin”.<sup>40</sup> A few days later, still in the midst of intense media interest, Hein wrote: “Zwischendurch versuche ich ein paar Stunden für meine eigentliche Arbeit freizuhalten. Es gibt Verabredungen mit Verlagen, und ich habe Sehnsucht nach meinem ungeliebten Schreibtisch”.

There is no doubt about what he considered to be his real work, as he confirmed in an interview with *Neues Deutschland* in December 1989, which underlined his reluctance to commit himself to social engagement, combined with a simultaneous sense of responsibility:

Sicher, seit Wochen mache ich alles mögliche, nur nicht meine Arbeit. Ich hoffe, daß ich bald wieder an meinen Schreibtisch zurückkehren kann. Ich bin kein Politiker und kein Journalist. Aber momentan denke

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<sup>40</sup> Christoph Hein, ‘Ein Brief an Sara, New York’, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.189.

ich schon, daß es Gründe gibt für ein paar Aktivitäten, die nichts mit Literatur zu tun haben.<sup>41</sup>

In the GDR, literature was burdened with the extra pressure of compensating for the lack of scope for public debate in the media. Hein had evidently not relished this feature of his work: "Ich habe diese Rolle immer kritisiert, um bewußtzumachen, daß dies nur eine Ersatzfunktion sein kann, die der Literatur nicht bekömmlich, sondern abträglich ist".<sup>42</sup> The potential loss of this political 'Ersatzfunktion' was viewed very positively by Hein. In his interview with the *Berliner Zeitung* before the fall of the Berlin Wall, he spelled out his hope that art could focus on its primary function, rather than having to replace newspapers:

Es ist für die Literatur völlig unwichtig, Neuigkeiten zu reportieren. Literatur ist, wenn Proust mitteilt, wie er Tee trinkt. Für die Literatur, auch für das Kabarett sind schwierige Zeiten angebrochen. [...] Diese Schwierigkeiten sind schön. Sie haben viel Anregendes. Die Riesenschlangen vor den Buchläden werden sich zum Zeitungskiosk verlagern.<sup>43</sup>

There was also a hope here that his work in the public field could be taken on by others and that he could concentrate on his writing. The following year he was more explicit:

Bestimmte Briefe können jetzt an den Staatsanwalt gehen, nicht mehr an irgendeinen, der sich für einen ungerecht Behandelten einsetzt. Das spart

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Irmtraud Gutschke, 'Ich bin ein Schreiber von Chroniken' in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.207.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Sigrid Löffler, 'Die alten Themen habe ich noch, jetzt kommen neue dazu' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*, p.41.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Dieter Krebs, 'Weder das Verbot noch die Genehmigung als Geschenk' in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, p.183.



Zeit. [...] Für mich ist es einfach befreiend, diese Ersatzfunktion nicht mehr erfüllen zu müssen.<sup>44</sup>

In the same interview, he refers to a wish to renovate his ivory tower as a means of finding the peace and quiet he needs to write.

The drawback for GDR writers who hoped for less interference in their work was that their literature in reunified Germany risked disappearing in a vacuum of indifference. Whereas artists may have been restricted by censorship and the expectations of the 'Ersatzfunktion' in the GDR, in reunified Germany the state, and, to a certain extent, potential readers, were likely simply to ignore what authors were saying. Hein pointed this out in an interview with the *Thüringer Allgemeine* in 1994:

Natürlich gibt es Gesellschaften, die sich nicht so schnell zum Tanzen zwingen lassen. Aber macht es nicht auch deutlich, was für Deppen uns in der DDR regiert haben? Die haben sich von jedem dahergelaufenen Literaten kritisieren lassen und - sich darüber auch noch aufgeregt. Wie weise lächelt doch unsere jetzige Staatsführung über solche Sachen hinweg.<sup>45</sup>

Hein referred to the decline of public interest in literature most clearly shortly before the publication *Das Napoleon-Spiel* when he asked in an interview: "Kennen Sie noch Leute, die lesen? Ich kaum. [...] Bücher lesen meistens nur

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<sup>44</sup> Günter Grass, Ulrich Greiner, Volker Hage, Christoph Hein, 'Es gibt sie längst, die neue Mauer' in Franz Josef Görtz, Volker Hage and Uwe Wittstock (eds), *Deutsche Literatur 1991. Jahresüberblick*, p.261.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Heinz Stade, 'Die Weisheit der Regierenden', *Thüringer Allgemeine*, 8 April 1994.

noch die, die eine Doktorarbeit zu einem bestimmten Thema schreiben wollen".<sup>46</sup>

For some GDR writers, the lack of resonance to their literature sent them into an existential crisis. Hein was asked in an interview in 1991 whether he had been affected in a similar way to, for example, Helga Königsdorf, who had spoken of a feeling of loss.<sup>47</sup> He replied that in general he did not suffer from this. That he was able to make the transition from the GDR to reunified Germany more easily than others has many reasons. He had certainly been more distanced from the GDR than many of his colleagues, not least due to his biography and the early problems he encountered in his education. Furthermore, as he has said on several occasions, and as is suggested in *Der Tangospieler*, his hopes that reform was possible were actually dashed in 1968. To a certain extent, it was also a matter of age differences. Whereas Christa Wolf and Helga Königsdorf, for instance, had experienced the creation of the GDR as a young adult and teenager respectively and had put their hopes in it after the horror of national socialism, Hein is fifteen and eight years younger respectively, and had not invested emotional commitment in the birth of the GDR.

Indeed, from the time that he sees that the East will not contribute to a real unification process, March 1990, Hein is not only hopeful about the positive role which the 'Wende' could have on the role of literature, he is also optimistic about the supply of material for his work. When asked at this time: "Fürchten

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Cornelia Geißler, 'Kennen Sie eigentlich noch Leute, die Bücher lesen?', *Berliner Zeitung*, 1/2 May 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Peter Teupe and Ulrike Weber, 'Wir sind (k)ein Volk', *GDR Bulletin*, 1/1992, pp.7-13, here p.11.

Sie, daß Ihnen jetzt nach der Oktoberrevolution Ihre Themen abhanden kommen?", he replied:

Im Gegenteil, ich weiß gar nicht, wo ich anfangen soll zu schreiben. Es wird spannend. Als Schriftsteller in diesem Land haben wir eine Chance, die es weltweit ganz selten gibt: daß man in seiner kurzen Lebenszeit zwei Leben führen kann. Die alten Themen habe ich noch; jetzt kommen noch neue dazu. Auf diese Chance sollten gerade Künstler und Intellektuelle mit Risikobereitschaft und nicht mit Depressionen und Ängsten reagieren.<sup>48</sup>

In an interview with Hammer in February 1991, Hein placed this attitude in the context of his declared role as a chronicler: "Ich habe mich immer als Chronist verstanden, ich schreibe doch nur das auf, was ich erfahre. Wenn ich ein paar neue Erfahrungen mache, werde ich darüber schreiben".<sup>49</sup> Such a sense of opportunity clearly sets Hein apart from those GDR writers for whom the end of the GDR created a crisis.

## THE EARLY POST-‘WENDE’ YEARS

In the years between German reunification and the publication of his next piece of prose, Hein retreated from the prominent public role he had played during the months around the ‘Wende’. In an interview given in September 1990, when asked: "Ist es gut, jetzt Ruhe zu verlangen für die Schreibenden, sie ihre Arbeit tun zu lassen, oder plädieren Sie für ihre Einmischung in die politischen Auseinandersetzungen?", Hein replied:

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Sigrid Löffler, 'Die alten Themen habe ich noch, jetzt kommen neue dazu' in Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder*, p.38.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, 'Dialog ist das Gegenteil von Belehren' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft*, p.44.

Ihre erste Pflicht ist es, ihre Arbeit zu machen. Künstlerische Arbeit. Daß es Zeiten gibt, wo man das ein wenig vernachlässigen muß, wie etwa im letzten Jahr, das ist verständlich, befreit aber nicht von der Verpflichtung, die Arbeit zu machen. Dennoch – man sollte nicht völlig auf Einmischung verzichten. Es muß ja nicht so heftig sein wie es in der jüngsten Vergangenheit notwendigerweise geschah.<sup>50</sup>

As he suggests here, however, he did not completely abandon his public role. On 13 February 1991, Hein's protest against the Gulf War was read on almost every stage in Berlin. In the same year, he protested against the sacking of the vice-chancellor of the Humboldt University in Berlin, Heinrich Fink, warning against a McCarthyite fanaticism in the search for GDR citizens' Stasi connections.<sup>51</sup> Hein also produced a highly ironic critique of Germany's attitude towards foreigners in 1991.<sup>52</sup> According to Hein, the cause of Germans' intolerance was not simply xenophobia, it was rooted in economic fears:

Nein, wir sind nicht ausländerfeindlich. Wir haben keine Angst vor Eurer Hautfarbe oder Religion, und Eure uns fremde Kultur achten wir und interessieren uns sehr für sie. Aber wir hassen die Armut. Und es ist leider wahr, daß viele von Euch besonders arm sind. Wir fürchten uns vor Eurer Armut, weil sie uns ängstigt. Wir fürchten den Bazillus Eurer Armut, wir fürchten, uns anzustecken.

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Christoph Funke, '3. Oktober – auch ein Verdienst Christa Wolfs', *Der Morgen*, 29/30 September 1990.

<sup>51</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Wir dürfen dem Ungeist keinen Raum geben. Der "Fall Fink". Offener Brief des Schriftstellers Christoph Hein an Joachim Gauck', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 13 December 1991 and Christoph Hein, 'Es geht um weit mehr als die Person des Rektors', *Freitag*, 14 December 1991.

<sup>52</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Eure Freiheit ist unser Auftrag. Ein Brief an (fast alle) Ausländer - wider das Gerede vom Fremdenhaß der Deutschen' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft*, pp.51-55.

In March 1992, he joined the board of directors at the weekly newspaper *Freitag*, the post-‘Wende’ successor to *Sonntag*. His sense of social responsibility and commitment was evidently still intact. Hein also addressed the phenomenon of racism in a differentiated way in his 1992 essay ‘Die Mauern von Jerichow’. He claims that hostility was not aimed at all foreigners in Germany, but reserved for those to whom Germans feel superior.<sup>53</sup> This essay reiterated Hein’s focus on identifying problems and afflictions in society without seeking to condemn. He calmly takes stock of the wild interest in former GDR citizens’ Stasi files and suggests that the issue should be seen in the broader context of conformity. In the first half of the essay, Hein sets out how different East and West Germany have become and makes a downbeat assessment of the length of time which will be required for the unification process to succeed:

Der Einigungsprozeß wird sich vollziehen, nicht in vier bis fünf Jahren, wie uns Politiker zweckoptimistisch und wahltagsorientiert verkünden, eine wirkliche Einheit wird Deutschland wohl erst in vier bis fünf Jahrzehnten erreichen.<sup>54</sup>

Hein certainly experienced bleak periods in the years after the ‘Wende’, which challenge the image of him as an invulnerable Claudia-type figure, who could bid farewell to hopes for his society without any sense of loss. In 1992, he gave a speech upon receiving the Ludwig Mülheim prize in which he addressed environmental problems and the prospect of mankind bringing about its own downfall. The element of hope which Hein drew from this was of the blackest kind: “Ihr [die Menschheit] Verschwinden wird den anderen Arten der

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<sup>53</sup> Christoph Hein, ‘Ansichtskarte einer deutschen Kleinstadt, leicht retuschiert’ in *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 4/1992. Reprinted as ‘Die Mauern von Jerichow. Ansichtskarte einer deutschen Kleinstadt, leicht retuschiert’ in Christoph Hein, *Die Mauern von Jerichow*, pp.71-100, here pp.98-99.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.89.

Schöpfung und der Erde Lebenschancen zurückgeben".<sup>55</sup> But, with regard to the end of the GDR (which, in 1992, he claimed to have described eleven times in his work<sup>56</sup>), he has generally shown little patience with those wallowing in despondency about their plight in reunified Germany. After being invited to a conference under the heading 'Exil im eigenen Land' - a title he found "obszön und ärgerlich" - he stated: "Wir haben Ostdeutschland nicht verloren. Ein politisches System ist abgestorben, das ist alles. Exil - das ist etwas anderes".<sup>57</sup> Here again Hein provides a sense of proportion and realism.

Hein's activities, both public and artistic, were severely curtailed in the autumn of 1992 after he suffered a near fatal stroke. During the months of recuperation, he worked slowly on his next piece of literature, *Das Napoleon-Spiel*. His first important interview following his illness came in January 1993, shortly after revelations about Christa Wolf's brief period of work as a young woman for the Stasi.<sup>58</sup> He said that he could never have been an 'IM' himself due to his background which distanced him from the state right from the beginning: "Für mich, durch meine Herkunft, ganz undenkbar". He pointed out again, in a similar way to his protests about the sacking of the Humboldt University's vice-chancellor, that an atmosphere of persecution was prevailing. From this point in 1993 onwards, however, the interviews which Hein gave focused on *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, which appeared later that year.

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<sup>55</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Unhaltbare Zustände als Status quo', *Die Mauern von Jerichow*, pp.101-105, here p.105.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Peter von Becker and Michael Merschmeier, 'Warum ich in der DDR geblieben bin', *Theater Heute*, 4/1992, pp.31-36, here p.32.

<sup>57</sup> Günter Grass, Ulrich Greiner, Volker Hage, Christoph Hein, 'Es gibt sie längst, die neue Mauer' in Franz Josef Görtz, Volker Hage and Uwe Wittstock (eds), *Deutsche Literatur 1991. Jahresüberblick*, p.268.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Detlev Lücke and Stephan Reinecke, 'Der Waschzwang ist da, also muß gewaschen werden', *Freitag*, 29 January 1993.

## CONCLUSION

Hein's response to the reunification process in Germany contained several apparent contradictions. On the one hand, he expressed a desire to work as an artist in an ivory tower. At the time of the 'Wende', on the other hand, he encouraged the GDR's intellectuals to concentrate on practical matters, expressing the hope that his involvement in the inquiry committee investigating Stasi violence would achieve more than statements of good intent. Hein's response to the demise of the GDR also appears confusing at times. Some of his remarks reveal emotional heartache, whilst others provide rational reflection on and acceptance of the process of change. Likewise, his refusal to sign the appeal 'Für unser Land' in late November 1989 on the grounds that it came too late may have been fully justifiable, but it does seem curious in the light of the comments he made elsewhere towards the end of 1989 which largely reflected the message of this appeal, with its warning of the prospect of a take-over by the West.

Looking back on the intellectuals' role in the GDR and the question of whether they had been sufficiently critical, Hein argued:

Die Intellektuellen haben ihre Aufgabe ganz gut erfüllt, und die bestand eben nicht unbedingt im Herbst 89 und in den folgenden Monaten, sondern in den Jahren davor, und ich denke, da haben sie ihre Aufgabe so einigermaßen erfüllt. Das war ein Wachhalten, ein Insistieren auf Geschichten, die eigentlich nicht möglich oder unerwünscht waren oder vergessen werden sollten usw. Ich denke, das war die eigentliche Aufgabe.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Klaus Hammer, 'Dialog ist das Gegenteil von Belehren' in Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft*, p.40.

During his visit to Swansea University in March 1998, Hein alluded to Heinrich Mann's view that one hundred years of Russian literature had been the "revolution before the revolution", as a means of explaining his understanding of the role the GDR's intellectuals and artists had played. In this sense, there is no clear dividing line between a public role and a literary one. He may have been torn between a sense of responsibility and feelings of reluctance to leave his ivory tower, but ultimately he did not shy away from engaging in the process of change. He gave speeches and interviews in addition to working on the committee examining allegations of violence by the Stasi.

Although the GDR was not in a strong position to contribute to a genuine two-way process of unification, Hein regrets that this opportunity was not taken:

Ich bedaure, daß es [...] nicht zu einer wirklichen Einigung kam. Wir haben uns nicht geeinigt, wir sind Westdeutsche geworden. Ich verstehe, daß das aus westdeutscher Regierungssicht etwas einfacher war. Man mußte nichts verändern.<sup>60</sup>

Nonetheless, in the early years after the 'Wende', Hein generally adopted a positive approach to the future prospects for his work and did not give the impression that he was about to enter a period of introspection and existential crisis. He suggested that reunified Germany would provide fresh stimulus for him as a creative writer. His success in maintaining the quality of his literary output in his new society will be the subject of the remaining two chapters of this thesis.

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<sup>60</sup> Günter Grass, Ulrich Greiner, Volker Hage, Christoph Hein, 'Es gibt sie längst, die neue Mauer' in Franz Josef Görtz, Volker Hage and Uwe Wittstock (eds), *Deutsche Literatur 1991. Jahresüberblick*, p.269.



## CHAPTER 6

“Ich habe [...] das Gefühl, daß ich so bis 1989 etwa das geschrieben habe, was ich zur DDR sagen wollte”.

Fresh challenges in *Das Napoleon-Spiel*<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to an interview given in May 1993, Hein was described as attempting to withdraw from public life after a period of major engagement around the time of the ‘Wende’.<sup>2</sup> That this interview focused on the publication of Hein’s first piece of prose after German reunification would suggest that he was indeed redirecting his attention to his ‘real’ work of writing once more. *Das Napoleon-Spiel* consists of two letters by the lawyer Wörle to his own defence lawyer Fiathes, one written before and one after his trial for murder. The crime in question has taken place in the carriage of an underground train in Berlin in the summer of 1989. Wörle admits to killing Bernard Bagnall, but denies the charge of murder, claiming that it was an unavoidable killing (“eine unerläßliche Tötung”). In the first (and much longer) of the two letters, Wörle attempts to

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Hein, *Das Napoleon-Spiel* (Berlin and Weimar, 1993). Page references in the text are to the 1995 Aufbau Taschenbuch edition. For comments by Hein on his decision to stay with Aufbau after the ‘Wende’ (e.g. “Das Schiff schlingert ein bißchen, da muß man an Bord bleiben”), see the interview with Christoph Funke, ‘3. Oktober – auch ein Verdienst Christa Wolfs’, *Der Morgen*, 29/30 September 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Cornelia Geißler, ‘Kennen Sie eigentlich noch Leute, die Bücher lesen?’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 1/2 May 1993.

provide Fiarthes with details which he believes will be helpful to him in preparing for the trial. This background information not only recounts the events immediately leading up to the killing, but also includes recollections of moments from Wörle's adolescence and career. In the second letter, we discover that the trial has ended in a success for Wörle. It closes with him setting out brief details of the next game he is planning and an offer to Fiarthes to participate in it.

### PLAYING A GAME

One of the first things to strike readers of *Das Napoleon-Spiel* is the link to Hein's previous work, *Der Tangospieler*, through the reference to the concept of playing in the title. *Das Napoleon-Spiel* moves away from music and takes as its subject the games which Wörle plays throughout his life, culminating in the killing of Bagnall. The specific game most referred to is billiards, which Hein has said interests him from the perspective the game offers of calculating many possible scenarios,<sup>3</sup> a reflection maybe of his university studies in logic. Wörle plots the killing of Bagnall on the billiard table and says that, from this moment, it is simply a case of putting the plan into practice, which he does with the aid of a billiard cue:

Und auch das, was Sie ein unglückliches und rätselhaftes Ereignis nennen, es geschah dort, in dem Zimmer in Kampen, auf dem Tisch mit dem grünen Tuch (p.90).

Am 12. Mai 1988 verließ ich Kampen und fuhr nach Berlin zurück. Ich hatte fast zwölf Tage lang am Tisch gestanden, und mein Spiel war wieder sicher und genau geworden. Ich hatte mich in diesen Tagen entschieden und alle Möglichkeiten, die sich ergeben konnten,

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

durchgespielt. Was mir zu tun übrigblieb, war lediglich, die erfolgreich beendete Partie in die banale Realität umzusetzen (p.153).

Hein has described writing as being like a game of chess in the sense that the author has to consider the game from his partner's perspective as well as his own.<sup>4</sup> Wörle compares and contrasts chess and billiards and concludes that the latter offers a greater challenge as it does not simply involve planning a move, but also carrying it out successfully (p.101). The killing of Bagnall may be the banal realisation of plans carefully hatched on the billiard table, but the 'coup', even away from the green baize, still needs to be executed with precision.

Wörle's life is marked by more games than just billiards. He describes the way he defeated his younger stepbrother in a power struggle as a child (p.39), and his move into politics is inspired, among other things, by the recognition that politicians are players (p.107). The killing of Bagnall is simply the most recent in a series of games. Napoleon serves as a role model for this game, and his conquests provide the rationale for its rules. Wörle describes Napoleon as a great player (p.11), the kind not often seen by the world (p.41), the most important player of modern history (p.120), and a man who played for all or nothing (p.159). Wörle argues that if people accept Napoleon's decision to invade Russia, in which he sacrificed more than four hundred thousand people, then why should they object to him, Wörle, sacrificing one perfectly insignificant individual, Bagnall (p.165)? His reasoning behind this question is that in both cases it is not the emotional reaction to the sacrifice which should be of paramount importance, but the rational one to the fact that, for Napoleon as for himself, this event was unavoidable. Napoleon sought to conquer Moscow even

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<sup>4</sup> Hyunseon Lee, *Günter de Bruyn – Christoph Hein – Heiner Müller – Drei Interviews* [MuK 95/96] (Siegen, 1995), pp.32-53, here p.46.

though he knew it could destroy his empire. But, Wörle claims, he had no other choice in the matter as this represented the next step in his game, which could not be halted. Wörle states that a victor is more vulnerable than a loser as defeat sharpens the senses (p.40). Napoleon realised this and never basked in the glory of his latest victory, preferring instead to pass immediately to his next game. Although this eventually contributed to his downfall, such a scenario was preferable to ending the game on an inconclusive victory and the only way to continue evading boredom. Similarly, Wörle says that his game with Bagnall was vital to his life and that he had no choice but to play it:

Ich brauchte dieses Spiel, es war für mich lebensnotwendig, und mir war klar, daß es für mich keinen Ersatz gab und damit kein Ausweichen. Ich stand vor meinem Moskau, ich mußte dieses Spiel spielen oder mein Ende akzeptieren (p.176).

Wörle perceives a key difference between himself and the majority of people in society in terms of the courage he displays in accepting the challenge of playing the game, rather than merely watching from the sidelines: “Die Masse will Sicherheit, nicht Spiel, und das trennt uns. Sie kann [...] nichts von dem verstehen, was ich tat” (p.137). Wörle’s game is defined differently from the normal premise of playing, where victory is the ultimate aim. For him, it is the game itself which counts: “Ein Spieler will setzen, um zu spielen, der Gewinn langweilt ihn bereits” (p.74).<sup>5</sup>

Wörle’s sense of superiority over the masses manifests itself in other examples. He claims, for instance, that they cannot accept the truth. In *Horns Ende*, Horn had urged the characters to strain their memories in an effort to uncover the truth

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<sup>5</sup> In Wörle’s career, his dream of earning his first million is destroyed when he achieves it.

in the past. Wörle is far more dismissive, believing that the truth is quite simple, but that the masses cannot cope with it. Right at the beginning of the letter he writes: “Unsere Gespräche haben mir nur allzu deutlich gemacht, daß ich mit der Wahrheit nichts gewinnen kann, weder Verstehen, noch Verständnis, noch eine Verteidigung” (p.5). He warns Fiarthes: “Mit der Wahrheit ist dieser Prozeß nicht zu gewinnen” (p.7) and argues that “die öffentliche Meinung kennt nicht das Recht, sondern nur Rache und Mitleid, Gefühle also. Das Recht jedoch ist gefühllos, es muß sogar taub und blind sein, um urteilen zu können” (p.10).

The language of his letter is correspondingly cool and detached. Sensuous descriptions are restricted to recollections of experiences from his adolescence when he used to sit on the laps of the female staff in his father’s confectionery factory:

Ich bewegte unmerklich den Kopf, damit ich ihre Schulter oder ihren Hals spüren konnte. Ich tippte mit der Nase auf den bunten Stoff der Kittelschürze oder streichelte mit den Ohren ihre Haut. Die Augen verschloß ich nicht, obwohl ich es liebend gern getan hätte, um mich stärker auf Sophias Duft konzentrieren zu können (p.21).

This stands in sharp contrast to much of the remainder of the text, which McKnight has described as Hein’s most inaccessible work, replete with legalese and bureaucratic formulations.<sup>6</sup> In adult life, Wörle generally distances himself from emotional language, not because he is cut off from his emotions like Dallow or Claudia, but, we suspect, because he sees himself as being above the masses who might use such language. When he does refer to his feelings, his formulations distance him from the emotions. “Der Gedanke [...] verursachte

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<sup>6</sup> Phillip McKnight, *Understanding Christoph Hein* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1995), p.115.

mir Depressionen” (p.81) and “Ich empfand [es] als belästigend” (p.84) are indicative of the kind of distancing language towards feelings which Wörle employs in his letter.

Towards the end of the first letter, he reiterates his view that the trial cannot be won with the truth:

Wir werden den Namen Napoleon vor Gericht nicht nennen können, ohne uns lächerlich zu machen. Und wir müssen, wenn wir auf seinen Namen verzichten, auch bereit sein, den Grund der Tötung zu verschweigen. Nicht im Interesse Ihres Mandanten, sondern im Interesse der Wahrheit müssen wir verzichten. Die Wahrheit ist nicht glaubhaft zu machen (p.178).

He recognises that if he is to win the game he is going to need a degree of spin in order to achieve the desired effect in court, manipulation which is characteristic of all the games he plays throughout his life.

In the second letter, Wörle suggests that he is not the only person playing games in this book - Hein's editorial persona is also involved. Wörle sets out how he intends to publish his two letters through the medium of an author:

Die Veröffentlichung soll einen neuen Stoßball auf den Tisch bringen, da Bernhard Bagnall nicht mehr zur Verfügung steht [...]. Freilich, ein paar Daten und Namen werde ich verändern und auswechseln müssen, und ich werde meine Beichte nicht unter meinem Namen veröffentlichen. [...] Den Gedanken, das Schreiben unter einem Pseudonym zu veröffentlichen, verwarf ich rasch [...]. Ich entschloß mich daher, den Brief, nachdem ich die verräterischen Details ausgetauscht habe, einem Schriftsteller zu geben, der das Ganze unter seinem Namen

herausbringen soll. [...] Ich vermute, ich werde unter diesen ausgehungerten Burschen leicht einen geeigneten Strohmann finden, der für Geld bereit ist, auf meine Wünsche und Bedingungen einzugehen (p.197).

At the end of the text, therefore, Hein adds a twist to the outcome of the game. As well as the protagonist Wörle, the author Hein, as we shall see in other examples, is also toying with his readers' assumptions.

### **NARRATIVE MANIPULATION AND HISTORICAL PRECEDENT**

After switching to a third-person narrator in *Der Tangospieler*, Hein reverts to a first-person voice in *Das Napoleon-Spiel*. Wörle is very much in charge of this narrative. By saying that he is responding to Fiarthes's request for background information about the killing, Wörle creates a clearer context in which to talk about himself than the protagonists in Hein's other prose works are given. In contrast to the sense of balance in *Horns Ende*, where the reader has access to more than one source of information, *Das Napoleon-Spiel* is restricted to the voice of Wörle, who believes that he is in sole possession of the truth. His self-assuredness also sets him apart from *Der fremde Freund*'s Claudia, where the reader can hear echoes contradicting her narrative voice.

Wörle is free to relay or omit as much information as he sees fit. Just as his billiard room in his house on Sylt is a no-go area for his visitors, there are equally taboo areas in his life to which the reader does not have access. He says of one of his games: "Ich fürchte, zu viel über mich zu offenbaren, wenn ich davon erzähle, und ein Spieler sollte kein offenes Buch sein" (p.89). Even when Wörle is quite open about his recollections, he still asserts his authority over the

narrative. When describing the women in his father's confectionery factory who had provided him with his first hints of sexual excitement as a twelve-year-old boy, Wörle writes: "Wir sind nicht am Ende dieser Reihe der Damen meiner Kindheit, aber Sie haben genug gesehen, Herr Fiarthes" (p.25). Since there are no other narrators, or even dialogue in which other characters would have the opportunity to provide a different angle on the story, the reader is required to play an even greater role in scrutinising what s/he is told. Wörle tells Fiarthes that he would like to hear his opinion occasionally, but he immediately removes the context for questioning and reflection by asking his lawyer to concentrate on the case for the time being: "Gelegentlich, lieber Herr Fiarthes, würde ich dazu gern Ihre Ansicht hören, im Moment aber bitte ich Sie, sich ganz darauf zu konzentrieren, meinen Fall voranzutreiben" (p.144). It is not until the second letter that we discover Fiarthes's reaction to Wörle's first letter. From what Wörle writes, it is clear that Fiarthes has been outraged by Wörle's justification for the killing: "Es war ein bitterer Moment für mich, als Sie mich so brüsk und für alle Zukunft zurückstießen, ein sehr bitterer Moment" (p.196). He also refers to Fiarthes's "Empörung" (p.199).

Wörle is as manipulative in composing his letter as he is in the games he recounts to Fiarthes. The basic facts surrounding the killing of Bagnall can be summarised in a matter of lines. Indeed, Wörle, albeit somewhat grumpily, reels them off at various points in the story. At the beginning of the first letter, for instance, he writes:

Die Tötung Bernhard Bagnalls erfolgte am Abend des 21. Juni. Sechs Monate zuvor war mein Vater gestorben. Sein Tod war insofern ein auslösendes Moment, als ich den alten Herrn (meine Stiefmutter starb



bereits vor sieben Jahren) nicht mit den Mißlichkeiten hatte behelligen wollen, die auch für ihn nach meiner Verhaftung entstanden wären. Ich wurde im August 1932 in Stettin geboren. Mein Vater war Besitzer der Süßwarenfabrik Frieder Wörle & Co., eines Betriebs mit achtzehn Angestellten, mit wenigen Ausnahmen weiblichen. Meine Mutter war eine Dame der Gesellschaft [...]. Ich war das einzige Kind meiner Eltern und wurde verwöhnt (p.13).

Yet the degree to which these facts are emphasised varies throughout the letters. When Wörle later recounts the events close to the killing of Bagnall, he fails to mention his father's death, thus creating doubts about the reliability of what Wörle tells us as 'narrator'.

Wörle is not only in control of what is told, but also how it is recounted. Specifically, he controls the pace of the narrative, something which he can exploit to produce his desired response from his reader. Although he has set himself the task of providing background information to the killing of Bagnall, he regularly digresses from the facts immediately surrounding his death. Long paragraphs of reflection, which break up the very closely recorded temporal development of the letter, are the result. Wörle tells us of his time spent in the Rhineland working as a lawyer: "Boppard ist eine Kleinstadt. Mehr ist über diese drei Jahre nicht zu sagen" (p.59). In contrast to this snappy comment however, he then spends ten pages recounting a particular trial during his time there, before eventually moving on to his departure for Berlin. This pattern is repeated elsewhere. He writes of his years in local politics: "Es waren glückliche Jahre" (p.107). This one-sentence paragraph is then followed by long paragraphs pondering the role of game-playing in politics. Such lengthy instances of

digression test the concentration of the reader, who runs the risk of not maintaining resistance to Wörle's argumentation.

Wörle's subsequent responses to these moments of digression also serve a purpose, namely, of establishing a bond with Fiarthes. They allow Wörle to reawaken interest: "Blättern Sie nicht, Herr Kollege" (p.25), "Vermutlich protestieren Sie jetzt, Herr Fiarthes?" (p.89), "Schütteln Sie nicht den Kopf, Herr Kollege" (p.91), "Aber Sie werden unwillig, Verehrter, und völlig zu Recht. Ich schweife fortwährend ab" (p.97), "Langweile ich Sie, Verehrter?" (p.102), "Sie runzeln die Stirn? Sie haben recht, ich vergeude Ihre Zeit und will rasch zum Ende kommen" (p.202). The result of this structure is a variety of pace in the letter, which Wörle uses to push his reader in his preferred direction.

One of the most important examples of digression is when Wörle writes long paragraphs about playing and the masses' relationship to risk-taking, culminating in a direct appeal to Fiarthes (see the pages leading up to p.138). At this point, Wörle shortens his paragraphs and addresses Fiarthes directly: "Ich habe mich überschätzt, Fiarthes, ich bin durchaus nicht in der Lage, die Haft lange zu ertragen", "Fiarthes, ich setze auf Sie", "Es würde mir helfen, Fiarthes, wenn [...]" (all p.138), "Helfen Sie Fiarthes! Bitte! Und bitte, rasch!" (p.145). Wörle's appeal for help from Fiarthes stands out against the background of the preceding long digressions. He seeks to evoke an emotional response from his reader in the hope of now gaining his sympathy (the appeal to reason, in the form of the Napoleon analogy, having been made earlier in the letter). Wörle generally chooses to address his lawyer simply as Fiarthes in this passage as he is making a personal appeal and underlining the urgency of the matter. At the

beginning of the letter, he flatters Fiarthes with such forms of address as “Lieber Herr Fiarthes” (p.5), “Sie, Verehrtester” (p.6) and “Verehrter und geschätzter Kollege” (p.10), the latter also serving to create a bond between the two men on a professional level. Having made the personal appeal, Wörle reverts to the professional form at the end of the letter as he seeks to concentrate Fiarthes’s mind on his job: “Ich schließe den Brief. Nun sind Sie am Zug. Good luck, Herr Kollege” (p.194). For Wörle, it is evidently not simply a matter of addressing his reader in order to focus his attention, but also of the form in which he does this, depending on the spin which he is attempting to apply at a given moment.

Although Wörle is free to control both the pace of the letter and the choice of events included in it, he does provide a skeleton structure, which allows us to reconstruct his life precisely. Towards the end of the first letter, his marking posts are so clear that the events can be reconstructed virtually to the day. Temporally, the structure has a neat balance. When Wörle tells us, roughly halfway through the first letter, of his decision to move into local politics (a major turning point in his life), twenty-three years have been covered, from his visits to the factory at the age of twelve (in 1944) to 1967. The remaining half of the action covers twenty-two years up to 1989. Within this structure, there are of course differences in emphasis. Wörle’s seven years in Berlin, in which he sets up his office as a lawyer and becomes a millionaire, are recounted in three pages (pp.69-72). In contrast, the recalling of his adolescent experiences in the factory require eleven pages (pp.16-27). Wörle stresses to Fiarthes the significance of this period in his life (p.25), a time which is closely examined neither for the first nor the last time in Hein’s prose.

The focus for Wörle is very much on his personal story. His move into local politics in 1967 occurs at a time of great social and political conflict, when one generation was about to confront its parents' past. Yet Wörle's recollection centres on the developments within his personal game. There is no mention of key years in post-war history which feature in other works by Hein, such as 1953 or 1956. The only time the wider political climate is mentioned is when it encroaches on Wörle's freedom and game such as when he is arrested during a visit to his parents' home in the GDR (p.52). Hence, it is not the outbreak and end of the war which he recalls from his youth, but his experiences in the factory. Whilst these events of 'big history' generally only occur in the background of Hein's other works, they do nonetheless provide a framework for the personal lives of the characters. In *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, the personal story is all that counts for Wörle, and where 'big history' does impede on his life, he does not like to accord it much importance.

This narrow concentration on his own life does not mean however that historical awareness is wholly absent in *Das Napoleon-Spiel*. Indeed, as we have already seen, Napoleon is Wörle's role model. Wörle has a great deal of respect for history, describing "Die Dame Geschichte" as "eine große Spielerin, die Göttin der Spieler" (p.201).<sup>7</sup> The strength of history's influence is underlined in the case of his stepbrother, who, as we learn in the second letter, falls victim to political developments in the GDR. As in *Der Tangospieler*, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 provides the context. Working as a lecturer in history at the University of Leipzig at the time, the stepbrother had criticised the

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<sup>7</sup> Hein himself personified history when he spoke of the way in which it was already mocking those people who, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, were talking of the end of history. See Christoph Hein, 'Unbelehrbar – Erich Fried', *Die Mauern von Jerichow* (Berlin and Weimar, 1996), pp.46-63, particularly p.57. (This article first appeared as 'Unbelehrbarsein ist die Pflicht des Intellektuellen', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 25 May 1990).

military action in front of his students and had consequently been sacked. In order to obtain permission to work at a school in the GDR he subsequently agreed to take on a role in the party or trade union. This causes him to become a victim of history for a second time, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when he is sacked for having served as an official in the GDR. Wörle does therefore describe instances where history has the power to determine people's lives, but he himself does not wish to become a victim in its games. The only explicit mention of the impact of events in 1968 is made in reference to his "bastard" stepbrother.

#### THE POST-‘WENDE’ CONTEXT

In the interviews which Hein gave around the time of the publication of *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, he played down the fact that this was his first piece of prose to appear after German reunification. It is also of course the first book by Hein in which the impact of the ‘Wende’ features. The killing of Bagnall takes place in the summer of 1989<sup>8</sup> and, in the second letter, we learn that Wörle is visited in prison by his stepbrother after the fall of the Wall. Hein stated though that he did not feel any pressure to write the all encompassing ‘Wende-Roman’: “Es gibt einen Erwartungsdruck, aber der kommt allein von mir, allenfalls”.<sup>9</sup> When asked about this a few years later, Hein responded slightly differently. He confirmed the existence of a pressure to produce ‘the novel of German unity’, whilst, at the same time, stressing that *Das Napoleon-Spiel* had been a disappointment to the critics precisely because it did not represent the definitive ‘Wende-Roman’:

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<sup>8</sup> That the killing takes place the summer of 1989 at the border between East and West Berlin can be seen, I would argue, as another example of Hein playing with his readers, who may be tempted to look for symbolism in such a context.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Karin Großmann, ‘Mit etwas Rückgrat durch die Zeitläufte kommen’, *Sächsische Zeitung*, 17 December 1994.

Es gibt einen Druck, keine Frage. Das merkte ich auch ganz stark bei mir. Von mir hatte der Wenderoman zu kommen. Ich glaube, dass 'Das Napoleon-Spiel' besonders eine Enttäuschung war. Man hatte von mir gehofft, ich würde einen Roman schreiben, der die endgültige Verurteilung der DDR wäre. Es interessierte mich gar nicht. Wenn der Staat noch lebendig wäre, und virulent und spannend, wäre es auch spannend gewesen, so etwas zu schreiben.<sup>10</sup>

This latter comment appears more credible. Rather than retrospectively pretending that such a pressure had existed in the early 1990s, it is more plausible that Hein had been trying to defy the expectations of critics and public in the earlier interview. As we have seen elsewhere, Hein dislikes being placed in a particular category and occasionally makes statements to this end which should be regarded with a degree of scepticism.

Hein maintained in 1994 that his life had not changed much after reunification: "Die Arbeit ist die gleiche geblieben. Die Arbeit ist doch im Zentrum meines Lebens. Da hat sich wenig verändert".<sup>11</sup> In a separate interview, he spelled out some of the elements of continuity in his work.

Ach wissen Sie, für mich hat sich doch merkwürdigerweise überhaupt nichts verändert. Ich schreibe nach wie vor etwas darüber, was ich erlebt habe, das findet Leser und die regierungsnahe Presse unterstellt nach wie vor, daß unser Leben nicht so schlimm sei, wie ich es beschreibe.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Bill Niven and David Clarke, 'Ich arbeite nicht in der Abteilung Prophet' in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein* (Cardiff, 2000), pp.14-24, here p.24.

<sup>11</sup> Hyunseon Lee, *Günter de Bruyn – Christoph Hein – Heiner Müller – Drei Interviews* [MuK 95/96], p.35.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Heinz Stade, 'Die Weisheit der Regierenden', *Thüringer Allgemeine*, 8 April 1994.

Shortly before the publication of *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, Hein had reaffirmed his East German identity in post-reunification Germany: “Ich [werde] voraussichtlich als DDR-Schriftsteller in die Grube fahren. Oder als ostdeutscher”.<sup>13</sup> This does not mean that he was displaying the kind of nostalgia for the East which he describes as being encapsulated in the attitude: “Jetzt habe ich mein Westauto und meine Satellitenschüssel, jetzt kann Honecker wiederkommen”.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary. Despite reasserting his East German identity, Hein felt at this point that it was time to move on and break new ground. In April 1993, he stated in a radio interview:

Meine früheren Arbeiten, die hatten mit der DDR, mit Ostdeutschland zu tun. Da habe ich, glaube ich, erst mal alles abgearbeitet, ich werde sicher nochmals zu dem Thema zurückkommen, ich habe ja viele Jahre hier gelebt, zur Zeit habe ich nicht das Gefühl, daß ich noch irgendwas sagen muß, oder ich hatte das Gefühl, daß ich erst mal alles gesagt habe.<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere he said: “Ich habe zwar das Gefühl, daß ich so bis 1989 etwa das geschrieben habe, was ich zur DDR sagen wollte. Mit dem bin ich auch einigermaßen zufrieden”.<sup>16</sup> Hein is supported in this position by Jochen Hieber, who wrote on the day the serialisation of *Das Napoleon-Spiel* began in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*:

Dieser Autor hat keinen Nachholbedarf in Sachen DDR. Er hat viel mehr, was man ihn nicht verdenken kann, entschieden genug von ihr. Mit ‘Napoleon-Spiel’, seinem neuen Roman, den wir von heute an in

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Lutz Hoyer, ‘Ich werde als DDR-Schriftsteller in die Grube fahren’, *Freitag*, 28 May 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Detlev Lücke and Stephan Reinecke, ‘Der Waschzwang ist da, also muß gewaschen werden’, *Freitag*, 29 January 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Joachim Campe, ‘Texte + Zeichen - Literatur Journal’, *Norddeutscher Rundfunk*, 18 April 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Cornelia Geißler, ‘Kennen Sie eigentlich noch Leute, die Bücher lesen?’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 1/2 May 1993.

dieser Zeitung vorabdrucken, bricht er deshalb konsequent zu neuen Ufern auf.<sup>17</sup>

There is certainly much that is new about Hein's work in *Das Napoleon-Spiel*. Not only is Wörle Hein's most ruthless character, *Das Napoleon-Spiel* is also his first book to be set mainly in the West. Although Wörle's adolescence is spent in East Germany, he studies in West Berlin and then pursues his career in the Rhineland before returning to West Berlin. Whereas Dallow travels to Hiddensee in *Der Tangospieler*, Wörle has a holiday home on the island of Sylt. One reviewer expressed the opinion that Hein had succeeded in breaking away from the context of the GDR: "Überraschend zeigt er, daß er nicht an den literarischen Stoff der DDR gebunden ist".<sup>18</sup> Most commentators felt however that Hein did not know the new society well enough to be able to write about it convincingly.

Joachim Campe showed some understanding for Hein by describing *Das Napoleon-Spiel* as a sketch rather than a book, arguing that he had not yet got to know the West: "Noch kennt Hein sich mit dem neuen Thema, dem Westen, nicht so recht aus".<sup>19</sup> Bernard Spies offered a similarly sympathetic approach: "It seems to be difficult for a writer (and not only for a writer) with a GDR background to become at least familiar enough with the new social reality to be capable of saying what is wrong with it".<sup>20</sup> Others were more direct in expressing their criticism that, with the collapse of the GDR, Hein had lost his subject matter. One wrote: "Es scheint tatsächlich, als sei dem engagierten

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<sup>17</sup> Jochen Hieber, "Das Napoleon-Spiel": Ein Roman von Christoph Hein als Vorabdruck in der F.A.Z., *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 February 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Anon., [Review of "Das Napoleon-Spiel"], *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 10 March 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Joachim Campe, 'Texte + Zeichen – Literatur Journal', *NDR*, 18 April 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Spies, 'The end of the socialist German state: The socialist utopia and the writers', *The Modern Language Review*, 2/1994, pp.393-405, here p.404.



Ankläger von Verlogenheit und Anpasserei mit dem Ende des Staates DDR sein Thema abhandeln gekommen”.<sup>21</sup> Marcel Reich-Ranicki shared this view and added characteristic bite to his critical comments:

Die alten Themen habe ich noch, und neue seien hinzugekommen – so hatte er sich gerühmt. Nein, das trifft nun eben nicht zu: Die einen sind offenbar schon weg, die anderen vorerst nicht da – und beides scheint mir bedauerlich. [...] Aber zugleich sagt er: ‘Wo ich scheitere, lerne ich doch viel mehr, als wo ich siege’. Wirklich? Nun, wir werden sehen. Denn Christoph Hein hat jetzt eine gute Gelegenheit, allerlei zu lernen.<sup>22</sup>

Chaim Noll, in *Die Welt*, was even more scathing. He not only found the novel “furchtbar langweilig”, but also claimed that Hein was bitter about the collapse of his state: “Die Innung professioneller DDR-Moralisten, der er angehört, löst sich endgültig auf: Er ist bald der letzte aus diesem Kreis, dem noch keine Verbindung zur Staatssicherheit nachgewiesen wurde”.<sup>23</sup>

At the heart of this criticism was the feeling that Hein had prematurely condemned Western society by warning through the character of Wörle against an overemphasis on freedom at the expense of social responsibility. Indeed, in the same interview in which he stressed his East German identity, Hein had acknowledged, with regard to the thematic content of *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, that “Asozialität und Freiheit haben sehr viel mit einander zu tun”.<sup>24</sup> Napoleon had been very free, but taking freedom in its purest form is socially unacceptable due to the restrictions this imposes on others’ freedom. Ulrike Boehmel Fichera

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<sup>21</sup> Susanne Schanda, ‘Tödliche Spiele gegen tödliche Langeweile’, *Der Bund*, 24 June 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Marcel Reich-Ranicki, ‘Der Billardmörder’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 April 1993.

<sup>23</sup> Chaim Noll, ‘Lieber ein Verbrecher sein als ein Versager’, *Die Welt*, 25 March 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Lutz Hoyer, ‘Ich werde als DDR-Schriftsteller in die Grube fahren’, *Freitag*, 28 May 1993.

interpreted *Das Napoleon-Spiel* as being a warning specifically about the society in which Hein was now living, a “Warnung vor einem jenseits aller moralischen Verpflichtungen handelnden Individuum in einer Gesellschaft ohne ethische Maßstäbe”.<sup>25</sup> Volker Hage claimed that Wörle was “eine plappernde Pappfigur, erfunden allein, um zu belehren, wohin es nach Heins Ansicht mit der Freiheit kommen kann”.<sup>26</sup> Hannes Krauss agreed, arguing that Hein had not succeeded in expressing his political ideas with sufficient literary subtlety.<sup>27</sup> David Clarke also saw elements of a critique of capitalist society: “The criticism of Western society which can be read in the figure of Wörle is indicative of the author’s concern at what he regards as the lack of a common idea in capitalist society”. Clarke concludes:

Wörle’s game-playing may be understood as the product of a desire to share in a stable set of values which might give his life meaning and purpose, combined with a disillusioned conviction that capitalist society has no such stability to offer.<sup>28</sup>

It would indeed appear to be more than a coincidence that Hein created his most antipathetic character in his first book to be set predominantly in Western society. As we saw in the previous chapter, Hein, at a time when many Easterners were celebrating their new freedom, was expressing his fear that capitalism would soon show its true colours after reunification.<sup>29</sup> Hence it

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<sup>25</sup> Ulrike Böhmeler Fichera, ‘Der Sieger. Christoph Heins “Napoleon-Spiel” (1993)’, *Literatur für Leser*, 3/1995, pp.130-136.

<sup>26</sup> Volker Hage, ‘Glückliche Knechte’, *Der Spiegel*, 12 April 1993, pp.235-237.

<sup>27</sup> Hannes Krauss, ‘Steigender Einsatz. “Das Napoleon-Spiel” – Ein neuer Roman von Christoph Hein’, *Freitag*, 9 April 1993.

<sup>28</sup> David Clarke, “‘Spiele aus Notwehr’: Re-reading Christoph Hein’s critique of the West in “Das Napoleon-Spiel”” in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein*, pp.83-99, here p.90 and p.97.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Frank Schumann, ‘Wer heute so laut schreit, soll sagen, was er früher tat’, *Junge Welt*, 2/3 December 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* (Berlin and Weimar, 1990), pp.208-214, here p.213.

should come as no surprise that some of his fears about the lack of social responsibility in the West should surface in this book. As Clarke says, Wörle's society does appear to offer little stability. Wörle almost envies his East German stepbrother for having a life with a goal. The hunger the latter shows after the fall of the Wall indicates that he does not need games as a way of avoiding boredom: "Auch strahlt aus seinen Augen noch ein Hunger, um den ich ihn fast beneide" (p.201). The key word here however is "fast". Whilst Wörle might toy with the idea that there should be more to his life than the games he plays, it is doubtful whether he would really wish to give them up. He almost envies his stepbrother, but in the end he prefers the life he knows best.

Some commentators have seen further subtle influences of the post-'Wende' context on *Das Napoleon-Spiel*. Martin Kane suggests that Hein was indeed breaking new ground following the 'Wende', but identifies different motives behind this move:

It was as if he had wished to deliberately frustrate the expectations of those who could conceive of him only in the role of critical observer of the shortcomings of the GDR, and to demonstrate that he was also a writer capable of lavish, unpredictable inventiveness on a subject remote from his own social experience.<sup>30</sup>

Phillip McKnight speculates that Hein's work on the committee investigating allegations of Stasi brutality in October 1989 could have exerted an influence on the characterisation of the lawyers who are his protagonists in *Das Napoleon-Spiel*:

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Kane, 'Germany. Christoph Hein: "Von allem Anfang an"', *Pen International*, 1/1998, pp.21-23, here p.22.

The committee was left with the feeling of ‘damned helplessness’, the precise situation in which Fiarthes finds himself. Further research may some day turn up connections between Wörle and one or more of the politicians or lawyers Hein encountered during his work on the committee.<sup>31</sup>

But McKnight generally plays down the specific German dimension of *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, arguing that it seems as if “Hein is trying to get at something broader here, at some element which exists in human nature that can take hold when human existence is devoid of compassion, principles, morals and ideals”.<sup>32</sup>

This argument is significant in that it extends the context of *Das Napoleon-Spiel* beyond post-reunification Germany and suggests that Hein’s comment on the interplay between freedom and asocial behaviour was not inextricably linked to his arrival in a capitalist society. It is interesting to note in this respect that the relationship between personal freedom and responsibility for others had featured in Hein’s first collection of short stories in ‘Der neuere (glücklichere) Kohlhaas. Bericht über einen Rechtshandel aus den Jahren 1972/73’, which was of course written and set in the GDR. As for *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, Hein denies that Wörle is intended to be a prototype of the Westerners with whom he had become more familiar following the ‘Wende’ and points out that the story originated from before the fall of the Wall. He had, he says, first met a figure of this kind in the early 1980s and work on this book had begun at the end of the 1980s.<sup>33</sup> Hein also stated:

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<sup>31</sup> Phillip McKnight, *Understanding Christoph Hein*, p.133.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p.124.

<sup>33</sup> Joachim Campe, ‘Texte + Zeichen – Literatur Journal’, *NDR*, 18 April 1993.

Die Geschichte ist alt, die ersten Aufzeichnungen stammen etwa von Ende 82. Daß ich sie im Westen angesiedelt habe, hat einfach damit zu tun, wo ich diesen Spieler gesehen habe. Ich habe ihn mehrmals gesehen. Der ergiebigste war vergleichbar mit dem, den ich beschrieben habe. Der Rest hängt mit meiner Vita zusammen.<sup>34</sup>

This final remark suggests that, as in his pre-‘Wende’ prose, personal experience features extensively in *Das Napoleon-Spiel*. In order to get a fairer picture of Hein’s first post-‘Wende’ work then, it is worth examining it for elements of continuity to his GDR work.

#### ELEMENTS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND MODERNIST AWARENESS

Around the time that Hein was working on *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, several former GDR authors were writing autobiographies, such as Heiner Müller (*Krieg ohne Schlacht*, 1992) and Günter de Bruyn (*Zwischenbilanz*, 1992). The first impression readers have of *Das Napoleon-Spiel* is that Hein is attempting something very different, far removed from his own experience. Yet he has claimed that *Das Napoleon-Spiel* is just as close to his own biography as *Von allem Anfang an* is, his next prose work, which, as we will see, contains many obvious links to his own life. *Das Napoleon-Spiel* is, Hein provocatively says, the sequel to *Von allem Anfang an*:

Ich wurde gefragt, ob ich irgendwann eine Fortsetzung [to *Von allem Anfang an*] schreibe. Aber die Fortsetzung gibt es schon – das ist ‘Das Napoleon-Spiel’. Die äußeren Punkte sind wahrscheinlich schwieriger

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Cornelia Geißler, ‘Kennen Sie eigentlich noch Leute, die Bücher lesen?’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 1/2 May 1993. Emmerich, on the other hand, refers to comments by Hein that he had also encountered people like Wörle in the GDR, see Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), p.506.

erkennbar, aber von der inneren, fiktiven Autobiographie ist das nicht anders.<sup>35</sup>

McKnight has pointed out some of the autobiographical features of *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, such as the family fleeing at the end of the Second World War and the protagonist's decision to study in the West due to problems in obtaining permission to do so in the GDR as a result of his father's occupation.<sup>36</sup> Further links to Hein's own biography become evident upon deeper analysis of the story. Wörle's comment in his second letter comparing the mentality of craftsmen and artists: "Das ist eines Spielers unwürdig und entspricht eher der Mentalität eines Handwerkers denn der eines Künstlers, als welchen ich mich sehe" (p.203) is a theme which Hein himself has raised in interviews as being central to the challenge he likes to set himself in his work.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Wörle's retreat to the tranquillity of the island of Sylt to plot his next move and gain some distance from city life echoes not only the actions of other Hein characters - Dallow's stay on Hiddensee, Spodeck's retreat in the woods, for instance - it also reflects a feature of Hein's own life. He has described how he seeks peace in his second home in the countryside as a contrast to Berlin.<sup>38</sup>

Chapter 3 of this thesis examined the links between the fictional town Bad Guldenberg in *Horns Ende* and the real town Bad Dübén, where Hein grew up. The castle stood at the centre of this comparison. It is interesting in the present

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with David Clarke and Bill Niven, 'Ich arbeite nicht in der Abteilung Prophet' in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein*, p.15. Hein makes a similar claim in a discussion with Marlies Menge in 1997 - see 'Nur die Masken erlauben Freiheit', *Die Zeit*, 29 August 1997.

<sup>36</sup> Phillip McKnight, *Understanding Christoph Hein*, p.113.

<sup>37</sup> See for instance the interview with Hein by Holly Aylett for a programme on culture in the GDR 'A Footnote in History?', shown on 'The South Bank Show', *ITV*, October 1990.

<sup>38</sup> See for instance Christoph Hein, 'Ein Brief an Sara, New York', *New York Times Magazine*, 17 December 1989. Reprinted in Christoph Hein, *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen*, pp.184-198, here p.188.

context to note that the most significant event in Bad Dübener castle's history was a stay by Napoleon, who spent a night there on the eve of the Battle of Leipzig in 1813. It was here that he plotted his next move following his retreat from Russia. A guidebook to the history of the castle states:

Am 10. Oktober traf Napoleon in Dübener ein. Die Burg wurde Hauptquartier der Großen französischen Armee. In Zweifel und Ungewißheit hat hier Napoleon nach seinen eigenen Angaben die schrecklichsten Tage seines Lebens verbracht.<sup>39</sup>

It is unlikely that this historical event would have escaped the attention of the young Hein and it is quite conceivable that it bore an influence on the motifs in this novel of Napoleon and the careful deliberation of the next move in a 'game'.

If the inclusion of some biographical elements constitute a link to Hein's pre-'Wende' prose, then so too do his comments at this time about the goals of his writing:

Wenn ich vor die Wahl gestellt werde, ob ich etwas als Chronist genau beschreibe oder als Moralist, dann werde ich mich immer für die Genauigkeit entscheiden. Auch wenn da vielleicht eine Unmoralität dabei ist. Das Asoziale hat auch einen großen Wert. Moralist mag der Leser sein. Ich stelle die Sachen vor, und das Urteil darüber möchte ich getrost dem Leser überlassen. Auch das Urteil über die Figur. Ich finde es einfach langweilig, Figuren zu erfinden, um sie zu verurteilen. Ich finde's dumm.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Willy Winkler, *1000 Jahre Burg Dübener: Geschichtliche Notizen im Landschaftsmuseum der Dübener Heide, Burg Dübener*, undated.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Cornelia Geißler, 'Kennen Sie eigentlich noch Leute, die Bücher lesen?', *Berliner Zeitung*, 1/2 May 1993.

Beyond the 'Wende', Hein evidently still sees continuity in his role as a chronicler who provides a precise description, rather than a moral interpretation, of things. Andreas Isenschmid, however, has challenged Hein's self-description as 'Chronist'. Isenschmid has claimed that the chief characteristics of Hein's books are existentialist traits such as boredom and the sense of being condemned to freedom.<sup>41</sup> Boredom is indeed an ever-present element in Wörle's letter. He is concerned about boring Fiarthes with his letter (e.g. p.72, p.74 and p.102). It is the boredom of being a lawyer which moves Wörle to look for an alternative game (it turns out to be politics - p.77). Playing, as we have seen, is a means of avoiding boredom (p.108, p.131, p.134 and p.161). It is with this in mind that Wörle closes his second letter to Fiarthes by asking him to join in the new game he has proposed:

Lieber Herr Fiarthes, verehrter Herr Kollege, ich hoffe, ich konnte Sie überreden, als mein Gegner mit von der Partie zu sein. Schließlich ist der Mensch, wie schon unsere Vorväter wußten, nur wo er spielt, ganz Mensch. Ohne diese Spiele ist unser kurzes Leben doch entsetzlich langweilig (p.208).

The emphasis on existentialist features such as boredom not only links *Das Napoleon-Spiel* to *Der Tangospieler*, but also, once again, to Camus. In this instance, the similarities are most evidently to *La chute* (1956).<sup>42</sup> *La chute* was originally planned as a novella for the collection *L'exile et le royaume*, but kept getting longer and longer, until it was published in its own right in 1956.<sup>43</sup> It is the story of a former lawyer Jean-Baptiste Clamence. He recounts his life-story

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<sup>41</sup> Andreas Isenschmid, 'Literatur nach der "Wende" - die Situation im Westen', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 8/1993, pp.172-178, here p.174.

<sup>42</sup> Page references in the text will be to the 1997 Gallimard paperback edition.

<sup>43</sup> Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus. A Life* (translated by Benjamin Ivry) (London, 1998), p.342.



in the form of a monologue to a fellow lawyer (but stranger) in Amsterdam, where Clamence is exercising his new 'profession' of 'juge-pénitent'. Whilst apparently describing his fall from being a successful lawyer in Paris to becoming a regular at a bar in the Dutch capital, he is in fact putting himself in a position from which he can judge and condemn others.

Comparisons can again be drawn regarding the context of the publication within the respective authors' careers. Although Hein expressed the hope that his non-literary commitments would diminish following his intense involvement in public life around the time of the 'Wende', a more personal reason had contributed to the impression that he was withdrawing from public life in 1992-1993. The publication of *Das Napoleon-Spiel* was delayed by some months following the stroke which Hein suffered in 1992 and the subsequent slow process of recuperation. Camus, as Olivier Todd has pointed out, was also physically and psychologically exhausted in the early months of 1956.<sup>44</sup> Todd sets *La chute* in the context of Camus's career:

'The Outsider' was all bursts of energy, short sentences, like machine-gun fire. 'The Plague' is more classical, somewhat old-fashioned. 'The Fall' is aphoristic. The narrative is an extraordinary technical achievement, an implicit dialogue with Clamence talking to someone who never appears, never talks. [...] 'The Fall' is Camus's testament in middle age.<sup>45</sup>

Without wishing to push the similarities too far, it could be argued that *Das Napoleon-Spiel* follows a similar pattern in Hein's career. Having made his mark with the subjectively focused *Der fremde Freund*, with its short, stark

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<sup>44</sup> Introduction to Albert Camus, *The Fall* (translated by Justin O'Brien) (London, 2000), p.v.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p.xviii.

sentences, Hein then produced a novel with a broader cast of characters (*Horns Ende*) followed - after a second study of an emotionally damaged GDR citizen - by a work of great technical skill in a strikingly different setting.

Both *La chute* and *Das Napoleon-Spiel* consist of a kind of monologue, communicated by one lawyer to another. As we saw in the *Horns Ende* chapter, one French reviewer heard similarities between Clamence and Kruschkatz in the tone of tragic irony in their narrative voices.<sup>46</sup> The stylistic similarities between Clamence and Wörle are even more pronounced. Clamence, like Wörle, stamps his authority on the narrative from the outset. He says that he will explain what he means by the term 'juge-pénitent', "mais il me faut d'abord vous exposer un certain nombre de faits qui vous aideront à mieux comprendre mon récit" (p.19). Wörle launches into his letter with a similar statement: "Ich erfülle nun Ihre Bitte, Ihnen den Vorgang und seine Vorgeschichte ausführlich zu schildern" (p.13).

Clamence, like Wörle, explicitly refers to the digressions which he makes during the narrative and asks for his interlocutor's forgiveness: "Mais je me laisse aller, je plaide! Pardonnez-moi" (p.16), "Je ne peux différer plus longtemps le récit, malgré mes digressions et les efforts d'une invention à laquelle, je l'espère, vous rendez justice" (p.60). He, like Wörle, asks for patience when he is setting out the background details of his life. As he digresses into his view of friendship and suicide, he is apparently pulled up by his interlocutor and asked to return to the night in question: "Comment? Quel soir? J'y viendrai, soyez patient avec moi" (p.31). A similarity can also be seen in the way in which Wörle and Clamence

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<sup>46</sup> Claude Prévost, 'Dialogues avec un mort', *L'humanité*, 10 June 1987

refer to their respective reader/interlocutor. Clamence flatters and attempts to build up a sense of friendship with his interlocutor by progressing from “cher monsieur”, to “mon cher compatriote”, “mon cher ami”, “mon très cher ami” and finally “mon maître”. As we have already seen, Wörle modifies his form of address depending on the degree of intimacy he hopes to share with Fiarthes at a given time.

Clamence describes his experiences of playing a game: “Dans ce commerce, du reste, je satisfaisais encore autre chose que ma sensualité: mon amour du jeu” and “Donc, je jouais le jeu” (both p.53). Both Clamence and Wörle feign interest in those around them, they both simply play a part. Clamence later states:

Sans doute, je faisais mine, parfois, de prendre la vie au sérieux. Mais, bien vite, la frivolité du sérieux lui-même m’apparaissait et je continuais seulement de jouer mon rôle, aussi bien que je pouvais. Je jouais à être efficace, intelligent, vertueux, civique, indigné, indulgent, solidaire, édifiant (p.75).

Beneath their attempts to create a bond, both Wörle and Clamence are self-centred, manipulative characters. When describing his search for the victim of his game (who turns out to be Bagnall), for instance, Wörle begins six consecutive paragraphs with the word “Ich” (pp.171-172). Clamence openly admits to his vanity:

Il faut le reconnaître humblement, mon cher compatriote, j’ai toujours crevé de vanité. Moi, moi, moi, voilà le refrain de ma chère vie, et qui s’entendait dans tout ce que je disais. [...] Quand je m’occupais d’autrui, c’était pure condescendance (p.44).

He also displays a similar sense of superiority over other people:

Je navigue souplement, je multiplie les nuances, les digressions aussi, j'adapte enfin mon discours à l'auditeur, j'amène ce dernier à renchérir. Je mêle ce qui me concerne et ce qui regarde les autres. Je prends les traits communs, les expériences que nous avons ensemble souffertes, les faiblesses que nous partageons, le bon ton, l'homme du jour enfin, tel qu'il sévit en moi et chez les autres. Avec cela, je fabrique un portrait qui est celui de tous et de personne. Un masque, en somme (p.117).

In his comparison of these two stories, Lothar Baier argues that Hein goes considerably further than Camus:

Heins 'Napoleonspiel' liefert eine viel radikalere Version der Spielergeschichte als Camus' kurzer Roman. An des Spielers Wörle Kategorien gemessen, wäre Camus' Jean-Baptiste Clamence als falscher Spieler zu bezeichnen, weil dieser vor den Konsequenzen immer wieder zurückzuckt, die er aus seinem, zwischendurch auch wieder bedauerten und zu Selbstanklagen führenden Amoralismus zu ziehen hätte.<sup>47</sup>

Hilary Wiesemann remarks that Clamence and Wörle are very similar in that they are both shockingly honest with themselves,<sup>48</sup> and goes on to state:

Although Hein has developed the theme into a much more complex concept, Wörle still shares Clamence's perception of social life as a game, his ability to exploit other people to his own ends, his attempt to use a 'game' in order to solve an existential problem and the sheer pride with which he describes his success.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Lothar Baier, 'Jenseits von Gewinn und Verlust. Falsche Erwartungen und Christoph Heins neuer Roman', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 31 March 1993.

<sup>48</sup> Hilary Wiesemann, 'Ohne Hoffnung können wir nicht leben'. *Atheist Modernism and Religion in the Works of Christoph Hein* (unpublished PhD Thesis) (University of Sheffield, 1998), p.174.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p.178.

At the core of the differences between Wörle and Clamence which Baier and Wieseemann mention is the fact that the latter is driven by a purpose: “Maintenant mon discours est orienté. Il est orienté par l’idée, évidemment, de faire taire les rires, d’éviter personnellement le jugement, bien qu’il n’y ait, en apparence, aucune issue” (p.110). His aims are to avoid judgement himself, to judge others, or better still, to get them to judge themselves, so that he is in a position of superiority to them. To achieve his goal, he plays a game in which he condemns himself and then extends the charge to his interlocutors: “Je plains sans absoudre, je comprends sans pardonner et surtout, ah, je sens enfin que l’on m’adore!” (p.120). Playing a game helps him to achieve his goal. Wörle shares the feeling of superiority which permits him to kill Bagnall for the purpose of his game. In contrast to Clamence, however, Wörle does not have an ultimate goal in the game. The game itself is everything. Although Clamence also makes a reference to Napoleon: “Nos amies, en effet, ont ceci de commun avec Bonaparte qu’elles pensent toujours réussir là où tout le monde a échoué” (p.53), it is to describe him as a role model for a different social group (women), rather than for himself.

Nonetheless, the similarities already outlined between *La chute* and *Das Napoleon-Spiel* in terms of the life history of the leading character, of the narrative perspective of a lawyer addressing a silent interlocutor and of his manipulative tone which seeks to draw the listener into accepting his reasoning mean that the links to Camus are as strong here as at any point in Hein’s career. Amongst other things, they show that the roots of *Das Napoleon-Spiel* do not entirely lie in post-‘Wende’ Germany.

## CONCLUSION

In the early years after reunification, Hein played down the impact of the 'Wende', claiming that his work had not changed much following German reunification. There are indeed elements of continuity in *Das Napoleon-Spiel* which pick up aspects of his earlier work, such as the relationship between personal rights and social responsibility. As in the pre-'Wende' works, features of Hein's own experience can be identified in *Das Napoleon-Spiel* and, once again, the influence of Camus is evident. The modernist approach is manifest in the readers' responsibility in not being taken in by the single, unchallenged and manipulative narrative voice we hear in the text.

But, in many other respects, *Das Napoleon-Spiel* does represent a new start by Hein. Wörle is the most antipathetic character he has created and, for the first time in his prose works, the West provides the centre stage for the action. Most commentators were critical of the book, suspecting that Hein was jumping to conclusions about a society he did not yet know. Such an interpretation is based on the assumption that the desire to break new ground was wholly inspired by the fall of the Berlin Wall and Hein's search for a new subject for his critical gaze. As I have argued, Hein's arrival in a Western society and concerns about what this entails should not be ruled out as one of the contributory factors for this new start and the chilling portrayal of a successful player in the West. Yet neither should the possibility that Hein moved on from his pre-'Wende' prose for reasons more connected with aesthetic factors. *Der fremde Freund*, *Horns Ende* and *Der Tangospieler* had all represented a new development in Hein's prose in terms of narrative perspective, but, as we have seen, contained broad similarities in terms of characterisation and thematic content. *Das Napoleon-*

*Spiel* presented Hein with a fresh challenge, extending beyond narrative approach, of creating a more ruthless and chilling character than he had produced up to this point in his career. Although Hein toys with the reunification context in *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, his success in mastering this challenge can be judged more fairly if this unscrupulous killer is not interpreted as Hein's dismissive view of his new society.

## CHAPTER 7

“Das alte Gebilde DDR ist vorbei, nicht aber mein Leben. [...] Ich werde den Teufel tun, und auf all diese Erfahrungen verzichten”.

A return to the GDR – *Von allem Anfang an*<sup>1</sup>

### HEIN'S PUBLIC ROLE IN THE MID-1990s

In 1994, the same year that the Reclam annual review of German literature included an article heralding his literary decline (see chapter 4), Hein was presented with the ‘Bundesverdienstkreuz’ by Federal President Herzog in recognition of his contribution to public life in Germany. One newspaper reported the choice of Hein and other artists for this accolade thus: “Sie haben sich, wie das Bundespräsidialamt zu der Ordensverleihung betonte, im kulturellen Bereich um die Verwirklichung der deutschen Einheit besondere Verdienste erworben”.<sup>2</sup> Further recognition of Hein’s work in the public domain came two years later when Aufbau published a new collection of his speeches and essays, *Die Mauern von Jerichow*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Hein, *Von allem Anfang an* (Berlin, 1997). Page references in the text are to the 2000 Aufbau Taschenbuch edition. This is the first work completed by Hein after the spelling reform of 1996 and it incorporates, as Hein stated during his visit to Swansea University in 1998, only those changes which he thought sensible. For further comments by Hein on the spelling reform, see Heinz Stade, ‘In weiter Ferne so nah. Eine Begegnung mit Christoph Hein zur “Erfurter Herbstlese”’, *Thüringer Allgemeine*, 7 November 1997.

<sup>2</sup> dpa/ND, ‘Roman Herzog zeichnete Künstler aus’, *Neues Deutschland*, 6 October 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Christoph Hein, *Die Mauern von Jerichow. Essays und Reden* (Berlin, 1996).



Just over half of the nineteen articles in this collection had previously appeared in *Als Kind habe ich Stalin gesehen* and *Öffentlich arbeiten*, or in the anthologies by Hammer<sup>4</sup> and Baier.<sup>5</sup> That three of the remaining nine had originally been published in *Freitag* provides an indication that Hein was taking advantage of his position on the board of directors of this newspaper as a regular means of publishing articles in the mid-1990s and thus of maintaining a role in the public domain beyond his production of literature. Some of Hein's articles in *Freitag* focused on literature and leading figures in cultural life, such as his words of congratulation to Hans Mayer on his ninetieth birthday<sup>6</sup> and an obituary for Heiner Müller.<sup>7</sup> *Freitag* printed the opening speech given by Hein at the Frankfurt book fair in 1994, which examined the identity-forming nature of literature.<sup>8</sup> But Hein also wrote articles with a broader scope, including critiques of elements of capitalism<sup>9</sup> and, on the occasion of the opening of Hamburg's 'Galerie der Gegenwart', of art museum directors' limited appreciation of modern and contemporary art.<sup>10</sup> He examined the relationships between politicians and society<sup>11</sup> and intellectuals and politics respectively.<sup>12</sup>

As in Hein's prose, attitudes towards history emerged as an important theme in his newspaper articles and interviews during the mid-1990s. On the fiftieth

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<sup>4</sup> Klaus Hammer (ed.), *Chronist ohne Botschaft. Christoph Hein. Ein Arbeitsbuch. Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie* (Berlin and Weimar, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Lothar Baier (ed.), *Christoph Hein: Texte, Daten, Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Neunzig. Gratulation. Hans Mayers Jahrhundert', *Freitag*, 21 March 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Christoph Hein 'Für Heiner Müller', *Freitag*, 12 January 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Prägungen. Eröffnungsrede der Frankfurter Buchmesse', *Freitag*, 7 October 1994.

<sup>9</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Die erdabgewandte Seite', *Freitag*, 17 November 1995. See also Christoph Hein, 'Unworte und Bilanzen', *Freitag*, 31 May 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Elfenreigen – Bildersprache in deutschen Nachkriegszimmern', *Freitag*, 7 March 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Die politische Klasse', *Freitag*, 23 February 1996. He returned to this issue a few years later in 'Freiheit macht arm', *Freitag*, 19 November 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Ich hielte gern Friede und Ruhe, aber der Narr will nicht', *Freitag*, 8 March 1996.

anniversary of the end of the Second World War, Hein challenged the kind of historical revisionism which sought to place Germans on the side of the winners in 1945.<sup>13</sup> On another of the many anniversaries occurring in this period, this time marking the fifth anniversary of German reunification, Hein took part in a debate in *Die Zeit* examining how courageous Germans had been in confronting their Nazi past.<sup>14</sup> Here he sought to redress the imbalance in the claim by the Polish author Andrzej Szczypiorski that the GDR was a people without history and that it had failed to accept any responsibility for the horrors which Germany had instigated in the twentieth century, such as the Second World War and Auschwitz: “Die Verantwortung für Auschwitz wurde sicher nur schwer übernommen. Aber ich denke, der Hamburger übernahm sie so viel und so wenig wie ein Leipziger”, claimed Hein. In contrast to Szczypiorski, Hein insisted that the war and Third Reich had been one of the main themes of GDR literature: he referred to the work of Bertolt Brecht and Christa Wolf among others as examples to support his case.

Although Hein was evidently considered by others to have made a significant contribution to German unity, he personally became increasingly pessimistic throughout the 1990s about the prospects of success for this growing-together process, which Willy Brandt, amongst other Germans, had anticipated. As we saw in chapter 5, Hein had predicted in 1992 that the unification process would last as long as the two states had been divided. In 1997, he revised his evaluation: “Heute denke ich, es dauert länger. [...] Das Desinteresse der Westdeutschen hat zugenommen. Das Interesse der Ostdeutschen am Westen,

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<sup>13</sup> Christoph Hein, ‘Deutscher Tag. Ein Nachschlag’, *Freitag*, 12 May 1995.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Wie mutig waren die Deutschen? Fünf Jahre Einheit: Streitgespräch zwischen Andrzej Szczypiorski, Christoph Hein und Detlev Claussen’, *Die Zeit*, 13 October 1995.

89/90 lächerlich groß, ist einem totalen Desinteresse gewichen".<sup>15</sup> Hein the chronicler registered strong enthusiasm for another Wall in Berlin.<sup>16</sup> Crucially though, he did not become resigned or paralysed in the face of this bleak prospect. Hein the public figure did what he could to encourage the growing-together process between East and West. Once again, *Freitag* provided the forum for an open letter by Hein to the two German Pen centres attempting to resolve the dispute of whether they should maintain separate identities or unite to form one association in reunified Germany. In his letter, Hein made it clear that he considered it anachronistic to maintain two centres.<sup>17</sup> He belonged to a group which forwarded a motion urging their unification, an appeal which was later to be fulfilled. This debate in many ways echoed an earlier one about the future of the two 'Akademien der Künste' in Germany in which Hein had expressed the hope that the academies could provide an example of successful unification. With an assertion hinting at an unwillingness to let the West simply subsume GDR institutions, Hein pointed out that the geographic basis had disappeared for both academies:

Am 3. Oktober 1990 hörte die DDR auf zu existieren. Weniger bemerkt im Bewußtsein ist, daß an dem 3. Oktober 1990 die ehemalige Bundesrepublik aufhörte zu existieren. Und es gibt seit diesem Datum auch nicht mehr West-Berlin.<sup>18</sup>

Hein was clearly determined that the two sides should seek to achieve genuine unification. As his comments in the debate in *Die Zeit* had suggested, he was

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<sup>15</sup> Marlies Menge, 'Nur die Masken erlauben Freiheit', *Die Zeit*, 29 August 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Uwe Kossack, 'Die Genauigkeit des Chronisten', *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* (2), 10 May 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Briefe an die beiden deutschen Pen-Zentren', *Freitag*, 28 June 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Volker Müller, 'Der Hanseatenweg liegt in Berlin-Mitte', *Berliner Zeitung*, 1/2 February 1992.

opposed to the GDR being summarily dismissed and forgotten, an attitude worth remembering when considering his next prose work, *Von allem Anfang an*.

## THE RETURN TO THE GDR'S EARLY YEARS

“Ich habe zwar das Gefühl, daß ich so bis 1989 etwa das geschrieben habe, was ich zur DDR sagen wollte. Mit dem bin ich auch einigermaßen zufrieden”. In his interview with the *Berliner Zeitung* around the time of the publication of *Das Napoleon-Spiel*,<sup>19</sup> Hein had made it quite clear that he wanted to move on from the GDR as a context for his writing. As we saw in the previous chapter, *Das Napoleon-Spiel* was a product of this wish. The second half of the quote from the *Berliner Zeitung* interview, however, left the door open to the possibility of returning to the GDR as the setting for his literary work: “Aber ich denke schon, daß sich mit mehr Abstand beim Beschreiben und Betrachten noch einiges anbietet”. It was not long after the publication of *Das Napoleon-Spiel* that Hein did indeed return to the setting of the GDR, this time to the period preceding the building of the Berlin Wall. In 1997, he published *Von allem Anfang an*, a novel set in 1950s East Germany.

The protagonist of this story is a thirteen-year-old boy, Daniel, who, from a perspective in the 1990s, recounts events in his life from Christmas 1955 to autumn 1956. As in most of Hein's longer prose works, the setting is divided between the town and the country. In *Von allem Anfang an*, three spheres of influence are present in the same story. Daniel's home is in a small town, not dissimilar to Bad Guldenberg in *Horns Ende*. He spends some of the holidays on his grandparents' farm in the country and, by the end of the story, he is

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Cornelia Geißler, ‘Kennen Sie eigentlich noch Leute, die Bücher lesen?’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 1/2 May 1993.

preparing to leave his family and move to West Berlin in order to continue his schooling. For Daniel, Berlin represents excitement and freedom, but also the disconcerting unknown. When considering his departure for his new school there, he states: "Ich hatte zwar Angst vor dem Heimweh, aber [...] ich könnte unsere langweilige Kleinstadt endlich verlassen und in einer aufregenden Großstadt leben" (p.174). Yet, shortly before leaving, he admits: "Der Gedanke, daheim zu bleiben und nicht in die aufregende, aber beunruhigende Großstadt zu fahren, war nicht unangenehm" (p.188).

Even before this move, Berlin had represented an ever-present alternative to his provincial childhood. The contrast between city and province is most apparent during a family trip to visit his brother in West Berlin. Members of Daniel's family, unlike the casual West Berliners, are captivated by the news that a popular revolt is taking place in Hungary (Daniel is also entranced by the technology of the electronic message board). Daniel's response is a determination to cover up his provincial origins: "Hier, in einem Straßencafé mitten auf dem Kurfürstendamm, wollte ich keinesfalls als einfältiger Provinzler entlarvt werden, der sich von Panzern und Gewehrsalven beeindrucken läßt" (p.186). Despite this wish to conceal his provincial roots, however, it is the provincial town where Daniel is really still at home, unlike Claudia and Dallow from *Der fremde Freund* and *Der Tangospieler*, for instance, who have moved on and away from their roots.

Not all commentators praised the return to the GDR as a setting for Hein's writing. Peter Jakobs wrote in *Die Welt*: "'Die 'Wende'", sagt Christoph Hein, 'hat mein Schreiben nicht verändert'. Als ob er das beweisen wollte, heißt sein

neues Buch 'Von allem Anfang an' und flüchtet in die fünfziger Jahre".<sup>20</sup> Jakobs unwittingly reveals here some of the difficulties faced by GDR writers in reunified Germany. A reviewer in the same newspaper had interpreted *Das Napoleon-Spiel* as a critique of the West and had described Hein as being bitter about the collapse of his state, with the insinuation that a GDR author should not assume himself capable of writing about the West.<sup>21</sup> Now Hein is being criticised for writing about the GDR again.

Nonetheless, Hein is evidently determined not to rule out his experiences in the GDR as a potential source of inspiration for his prose:

Das alte Gebilde DDR ist vorbei, nicht aber mein Leben [...]. Die bisher gelebten 50 Jahre [...] völlig aus dem Blickfeld zu verlieren, wird mir nicht gelingen. Ja, ich werde den Teufel tun und auf all diese Erfahrungen verzichten - sie sind der Reichtum, mit dem ich arbeiten kann.<sup>22</sup>

The autobiographical features of the text suggested by this remark will be examined later in this chapter. First of all, the narrative approach which Hein has used to structure these experiences needs to be established.

### A SEARCH FOR BEGINNINGS THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

The title *Von allem Anfang an* has been the subject of much speculation. A reviewer for *Der Spiegel* interpreted it as an echo of Botho Strauß's statement that the GDR had got "ALLES falsch von Anbeginn an".<sup>23</sup> Fritz Raddatz,

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Jakobs, 'Von der Bindungslosigkeit der Artistentruppe', *Die Welt*, 2 September 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Chaim Noll, 'Lieber ein Verbrecher sein als ein Versager', *Die Welt*, 25 March 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Heinz Stade, 'Die Weisheit der Regierenden', *Thüringer Allgemeine*, 8 April 1994.

<sup>23</sup> Anon., 'Leuchtschrift am Kudamm', *Der Spiegel*, 25 August 1997, p.178.

writing in the other leading German weekly, also detected a judgmental undertone in the title, saying that Hein captures “eine gesellschaftliche Zeit, in der ‘von allem Anfang an’ alles trügerisch war”.<sup>24</sup> Irmtraud Gutschke, in a review for *Neues Deutschland*, saw it in a less political way: “Ein Mann, Anfang 50, spürt seinen Prägungen nach – ‘von allem Anfang an’”.<sup>25</sup> In the UK, Peter Graves wrote: “This richly understated text invites the inference that, though more than thirty years were to pass before the sum of these corruptions led to the final decay of the GDR, the worm was in the bud from the very beginning”.<sup>26</sup> According to Hein’s lector Angela Drescher, the phrase ‘von allem Anfang an’ originally occurred in the story more regularly than it does in the final version, but Hein decided to remove it in some cases in order to avoid over-repetition.<sup>27</sup> The price for this stylistic preference is a probably not wholly unintentional degree of uncertainty among readers about the meaning of the title.

The search for beginnings in the past has marked much of Hein’s prose. In *Der fremde Freund*, Claudia, when looking back upon her childhood in G., thinks: “Vielleicht war ich nie eine andere gewesen, und es war damals nur der Anfang von allem” (p.84). In *Der fremde Freund*, *Der Tangospieler* and *Das Napoleon-Spiel* the protagonists take stock of recent events in their lives, whilst, to varying degrees, also probing the more distant past. The decision to have a thirteen-year-old character provide the narrative angle for events from the comparatively

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<sup>24</sup> Fritz J. Raddatz, ‘Besonnte Vergangenheit. Christoph Heins wenig nette Märchen’, *Die Zeit*, 19 September 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Irmtraud Gutschke, ‘Die grünen Augen des Evangelisten Lukacs’, *Neues Deutschland*, 2 September 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Graves, ‘A boy’s Soviet Zone story’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 October 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Angela Drescher, ‘Unvollständige Rekonstruktion: Über das Lektorat des Buches “Von allem Anfang an” von Christoph Hein’ in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein* (Cardiff, 2000), pp.25–40, here p.31.

distant past in *Von allem Anfang an* bears greatest similarity however to *Horns Ende*.

Daniel, like Thomas in *Horns Ende*, is at an age where he is eagerly taking in the world around him. Among the verbal phrases found in the first chapter are “So beobachtete ich sie weiter” (p.21), “[...], die ich aufmerksam registrierte” and “Es war mir aufgefallen” (both p.28). The cynicism found in characters such as Claudia and Dallow is not apparent here. Whereas Claudia describes Henry’s face as being “unregelmäßig, als wäre es aus zwei verschiedenen Hälften zusammengesetzt” (p.27) and notices imperfections in people’s hands and figure (e.g. p.35, p.64, p.79, p.130), Daniel gives us positive, affectionate descriptions of the people around him. We are told that his sister Dorle was a “sehr schönes Mädchen mit schwarzen Haaren und großen schwarzen Augen” (p.67). Daniel is struck by the green eyes of the visiting acrobat Kade (“meergrüne Augen, wie ich sie noch nie bei einem Menschen gesehen hatte” – p.109), and he is entranced by the bodies of the girls Pille (p.91) and Mareike (p.162). Even at his young age, Daniel is sensitive to the language (both words themselves and the messages conveyed by body language) used in his environment. When ‘Lebwohl’ is said instead of ‘Auf Wiedersehen’ during conversations between adults at his family home, Daniel understands the implications:

Obwohl Vater nie ein Wort darüber vor uns Kindern verlor und sich sowohl mit den Besuchern wie mit Mutter nur leise unterhielt, erahnte ich aus wenigen aufgeschnappten Bemerkungen oder dem verschwörerischen Verhalten [...] die bevorstehende Flucht (p.29).



Occasionally, Daniel is perplexed by the behaviour of people in his environment, such as the silence between his parents before his mother reveals that she is pregnant. But despite his young age, he is far from being a naïve observer of and participant in events around him. His attempts to gain the respect of older friends by sharing secrets with them (e.g. Jochen p.85) yet simultaneous willingness to assert his authority over his younger sister by playing on his greater knowledge (p.15, p.81) reveal a person who is just as likely to adapt his behaviour and language to the demands of circumstances as any adult. Wörle, the master of applying as much spin to his language as to the cue ball on his billiard table, would surely be proud of Daniel's efforts to impress Kade during his guided tour of the town with information he has gleaned from adults (p.115). Daniel even goes as far as to betray his town in order to seem more grown-up and create a bond with Kade. When Kade asks him: "Was ist das für eine Stadt. Kann man hier leben?", Daniel answers: "Nein, hier kann man nicht leben" (p.109), whilst secretly being confused at what this means - a consequence of his limited experience of life.

Hein has explained that the age of his protagonist helped him to achieve his goal of reflecting some of the wider social and technological changes in GDR society:

Ich wollte einen Text schreiben über einen Wechsel, der in der deutschen Gesellschaft Mitte der 50er Jahre stattfand. Der Wechsel von den agrarischen Lebensformen zu den moderneren, industriellen. Dafür fand ich dann eine sehr geeignete Entsprechung mit einem pubertierenden Kind, wo auch ein kleiner Wechsel stattfindet, der vom Kind zum Halbwüchsigen oder Erwachsenen.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Christian Eger, 'Der Kürbis, die Mauer und ein Gärtner in Berlin', *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, 7 October 1997.

This change and maturing process can be seen in various forms. The chapter 'Am Russensee' is the most obvious example of Daniel's growing maturity as it describes his sexual awakening, the result of him witnessing his friend Jochen make love with Pille (Daniel's own interest in his classmate Lucie and in Mareike, a girl he meets on a drama trip to Dresden, come later). Pille is the source of a further element of Daniel's growing maturity when she astounds him by saying that she intends to join the Party. The impression created by what he had heard (and evidently accepted as the truth) from his father and grandfather about people in the Party does not tally with his image of "die schöne Pille" (p.98). He is arriving at a point where he is having to make his own judgements and work things out for himself.

Each generation thinks it is the first to experience sexual awakening and to suffer lovesickness. This is neatly portrayed when Tante Magdalena, (Daniel's "Nenntante", with whom he spends a lot of time), to Daniel's surprise, guesses the reason for his troubled air towards the end of the penultimate chapter. How could his maiden aunt know about such things as 'Liebeskummer'? He asks himself "ob Tante Magdalena auch einmal für ihren Verlobten getanzt hatte, so wie Mareike für mich. Wahrscheinlich nicht, sagte ich mir, damals haben die Leute an so etwas wohl nicht einmal gedacht" (p.167). At this stage, Daniel is still unable entirely to conceive of his adopted aunt as a normal human being who would have gone through the same processes as himself. Yet the fact that he asks himself this question indicates that he is beginning to see her as an individual rather than simply his aunt, the way in which he had so far related to her. His relationship with his aunt provides a further yardstick of his own

maturity when he begins to feel that there are some topics he cannot discuss with her. Worrying that he could be the father to Pille's child, he states: "Aber darüber konnte ich mit keinem sprechen, nicht einmal mit Tante Magdalena. Damit musste ich allein fertig werden" (p.142).

Daniel is only slightly older than Thomas from *Horns Ende* (about a year), but the difference is a perceptible one nonetheless. Thomas may also have a crush on an older girl (Elske), but he remains very much a young boy, similar to the young Wörle who is entranced by the smell and feel of the women working in his father's factory. Although Thomas, like Daniel, finds his life boring and considers running away, he is less bold than Daniel. He seems afraid of the gypsies in Bad Guldenberg and does not want to get too close to them. Daniel, by contrast, actively seeks the companionship of the travelling circus member Kade. At the end of *Horns Ende*, Thomas is shown clinging to his father, crying over Elske's betrayal, Horn's death, but also "weil ich erst zwölf Jahre war" (p.309). At the corresponding point of *Von allem Anfang an*, Daniel is holding a relatively adult conversation with his aunt about the death of her fiancé in the First World War. Indeed, if we look at the text in chronological terms, rather than the order of the chapters, he is even preparing to leave for boarding school in Berlin at the end of the plot. Although similarities between Thomas and Daniel are apparent, it is clear then that Hein has set himself different challenges in portraying Daniel than Thomas.

## MEMORY

A further difference to *Horns Ende* is that the inter-textual links between the time recounted in the past and the present day are considerably more scarce in *Von allem Anfang an*. Whilst each chapter in *Horns Ende* begins with a conversation between the ghost of Horn and the present-day grown-up Thomas, the adult Daniel only makes brief intrusions into the text, as Dennis Tate has shown.<sup>29</sup> These intrusions generally consist of stocktaking comments, which put the events described in context e.g. “Von Mareike bekam ich nie einen Brief, obwohl ich ihr dreimal schrieb” (p.167). The relationship between the adult narrator Daniel and the boy he recalls in the text is nevertheless central to the narrative structure of the story. The adult Daniel sets out his position at the beginning of the text:

Ich versuche, die Geschichten zu vervollständigen, sie mit den Bruchstücken der Erinnerung anzufüllen, mit Bildern, die sich mir einprägten, mit Sätzen, die aus dem dunkel schimmernden Meer des Vergessenseins dann und wann aufsteigen und ins Bewusstsein dringen. Manche dieser Bruchstücke haben schartige Kanten, die in mir etwas aufreißen. Kleine Schnitte in der Haut, aus denen etwas hervorquillt (p.11).

The remembering process is often based on snippets of language and distant images. The adult Daniel does not use these in order to seek absolute precision about his memories. It is not the retrospective description of a memory in adult language that can convey the experience of childhood. On the contrary, Daniel uses phrases which he heard as a child, and which have never left him, in order

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<sup>29</sup> Dennis Tate, “‘Mehr Freiheit zur Wahrheit’: The fictionalisation of adolescent experience in Christoph Hein’s ‘Von allem Anfang an’” in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein*, pp.117-134, here p.124.

to access the mind of the child. He regularly mentions explanations and phrases which other people had used in his family: “Sie war nicht unsere richtige Tante, sondern eine Nenntante, wie meine Mutter erklärte” (p.10) and:

Die Stollen wurden von Tante Magdalena in ihrer Küche vorbereitet, sie hatte die bessere Hand dafür, wie mein Vater sagte [...]. Eine Stolle wurde angeschnitten, damit sie gekostet werden konnte. Um sie zu schmecken, wie Tante Magdalena sagte (p.32).

The purpose of reviewing his memories is not simply to add retrospective understanding and context to them, to interpret them from an adult perspective, but to use them as a means of accessing the feelings of his childhood. In *Der fremde Freund*, Claudia tried to capture the world around her through photographs. But this resulted in a lifeless record of the decaying images she had selected. In *Von allem Anfang an*, Daniel is not seeking the superficial precision of a photograph. Instead, he uses images from his memory to gain entry to the mind of the young Daniel. He closes the story by telling us that he does not possess anything by which he can remember Tante Magdalena, not even a photo (p.197). The previous two hundred pages of the story have already shown, however, that Daniel does not need a photo in order to remember her. The memory of shared experiences and conversations, inevitably partly fictionalised over time, is more authentic than fixing an image in a tangible form.

Michael Opitz congratulated Hein on successfully rendering a child's perspective, but also saw this as a weakness:

Mit beeindruckendem Einfühlungsvermögen läßt sich Hein auf die Gedanken- und Gefühlswelt eines Dreizehnjährigen ein. Doch gerade

darin liegt auch eine nicht zu übersehende Schwäche des Buches. Das Alter des Protagonisten bedingt eine gewisse Naivität in der Weltsicht, die [...] dem Autor [...] die Chance verbaut, ihn bewegende Fragestellungen von Anfang an aus einer intellektuellen Draufsicht zu entwickeln.<sup>30</sup>

Opitz talks in terms of the child protagonist spoiling an opportunity for the author to ask more probing questions. Yet the author is trying to let the adult Daniel access his childhood without adult preconceptions as a means of finding the starting point to his life. Opitz has misinterpreted the direction in which the relationship between the author and narrator, or more precisely the young and old narrator, operates. It is the child who hopefully is telling the adult Daniel about who he is, rather than vice versa.

The inspection of the past is not so rigorous here and characters are given the freedom to express themselves in their own words. In contrast to much of Hein's earlier prose, dialogue is prevalent in this story, from the first to the last page, and the conversations and comments by characters are longer. One consequence of this is that other characters are able to introduce the protagonist as "Daniel" straight away (Lucie says on page 6: "Ich dachte nur. Ich würde es verstehen, Daniel"), unlike, for instance, *Der fremde Freund*, where we do not learn the identity of the narrator Claudia until page 78. Page 15 in chapter one consists purely of dialogue, primarily short exchanges of one liners, and in the second chapter we come across longer spells of speech (e.g. p.24).

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Opitz, 'Formen des Beginns', *Freitag*, 10 October 1997.

Ricarda Schmidt has written about the use of indirect speech and the lack of conjunctions in *Der fremde Freund* which leaves the reader feeling cold.<sup>31</sup> A conversation with Henry recounted by Claudia provides an example of the use of indirect speech, littered with qualifying expressions of uncertainty, which is indicative of the non-committal nature of their relationship:

Heute könnte ich nicht einmal sagen, was das sei, ein Freund. Möglicherweise sei ich nicht mehr bereit oder fähig, mich einem anderen Menschen anzuvertrauen, was doch eine Voraussetzung dieser eigentümlichen Sache Freundschaft wäre. Wahrscheinlich brauche ich keine Freunde. [...] Manchmal habe ich ein unbestimmtes Bedürfnis nach etwas wie einem Freund (p.83).

Claudia's only alternative to this style is to claim that everything is fine really. The self-assertive statements in the final paragraph of the story merely echo her loneliness before the story ends with the word 'Ende'. *Der Tangospieler* closes abruptly with Dallow's opportunity to return to his old institute and *Das Napoleon-Spiel* with Wörle issuing a challenge to Fiarthes to join in his game. In contrast to these conclusions, *Von allem Anfang an* is less tense, with a dialogue continuing right into the last page, and indeed beyond in the sense that the dialogue with the reader about childhood continues past the end of the book.<sup>32</sup>

The mood is certainly more relaxed in *Von allem Anfang an* than *Horns Ende* with regard to the urgency of rediscovering the 'truth' of the past through

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<sup>31</sup> Ricarda Schmidt, 'Erlaubte und unerlaubte Schreibweisen in Honeckers DDR. Christoph Hein und Monika Maron' in Robert Atkins and Martin Kane (eds), *Retrospect and Review: Aspects of the Literature of the GDR 1976-1990* [German Monitor 40] (Amsterdam - Atlanta, 1997), pp.176-196, here p.180.

<sup>32</sup> Hein has said that men have regularly approached him after readings to tell him about experiences from their own childhood. See the interview with Martin Doerry and Volker Hage, 'Ich vermisse die alte BRD', *Der Spiegel*, 9 November 1998, pp.277-281, here p.278.

memory. In *Horns Ende*, Horn makes many statements, in life and from beyond the grave, about the importance of this exercise to mankind, such as: “Löschen Sie das Gedächtnis eines Menschen, und Sie löschen die Menschheit” (p.281) and “Wenn du mich vergißt, erst dann sterbe ich wirklich” (p.71). For Horn, there is a clear division between truth and falsehood, and he sees it as his responsibility to draw the line between the two. When Thomas comes to help him in the museum, Horn tells him: “Es ist nur ein kleines Museum, das wir haben, und doch schreiben auch wir die Geschichte. Wir sind es, die dafür einzustehen haben, ob die Wahrheit oder die Lüge berichtet wird” (p.81). He totally dismisses Spodeck’s view, similar to Claudia’s in *Der fremde Freund*, that we should avoid focusing on memories if they are painful to us. *Von allem Anfang an* challenges Horn’s insistence that a definite truth about past events exists and that it is purely a question of accessing this through memory. Daniel shows that a search in the past will never produce a full answer, and the sense of urgency in *Horns Ende* to learn lessons from the human misery of the 1950s before it is too late gives way to a process of slow subjective re-evaluation in *Von allem Anfang an*. Hein seems to be suggesting that the expectations he had expressed through the words of Horn in the earlier book had been unrealistic.

## CHRONOLOGICAL STRUCTURE AND APPROACHES TO THE PAST

The relaxed approach to establishing the truth is reflected in the temporal structure of *Von allem Anfang an*. In contrast to *Der fremde Freund* or *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, for instance, Hein does not mark the passing of time by continually referring to the progression from one month to the next. Here he opts for a looser episodic structure. The episodes range from Daniel’s holidays with his grandparents to the excitement of visiting circus acts in his town, from guest



speakers at his school to a trip to West Berlin with his parents. Clearly, this is not a meticulous attempt to reconstruct typical days during Daniel's childhood, but a focus on those moments which made an impression on him. With events in Hungary allowing us to identify the story as taking place in 1956, we can deduce that the chronological development of the story starts at Christmas 1955 ('Schöne Bescherung') and passes through the academic year ('Flüssige Luft'), the school holidays ('Großvater und die Bestimmer', 'Am Russensee', 'Der Evangelist Lukas', 'Ende der Großen Ferien'), the autumn half-term holiday ('Die schlummernde Venus und die Hausordnung') and finally the trip to Berlin in November ('Glance surprise'). The one remaining chapter, the first one ('Krieg zur See'), is in chronological terms the last chapter as Daniel prepares to leave home to continue his education in Berlin.

Although the time progression can be reconstructed, there is often no direct link between the chapters, and new characters are regularly introduced from one chapter to the next without an explanation of who they are, such as Herr Greschke (p.37), Jochen (p.83) and Kade (p.104). The first chapter in chronological terms, the second in the book, begins with the sentence: "Auch Weihnachten sprach Mutter nicht mit Vater" (p.18), thus linking the beginning of the action into a wider context. It finishes with the remark: "Ich habe nicht erfahren, ob sie nochmals monatelang nicht mit meinem Vater gesprochen hat" (p.36). This neatly rounds off this chapter as its own entity, and, when the next chapter begins with the quote: "'Wir sehen uns erst in einer Woche', sagte Herr Greschke", (p.37), the link to the previous chapter both in terms of characterisation and time scale is not apparent. We have to deduce that this is in the winter through details such as the visiting lecturer wearing a fur coat, hat and

scarf (p.40). The next chapter 'Großvater und die Bestimmer' begins with Daniel and his family in a train carriage on a journey, which Daniel subsequently explains by putting it in context: "In den Sommerferien führen wir jedes Jahr zu den Großeltern" (p.60). By contrast, some of the chapters have a clear link. Towards the end of the chapter 'Der Evangelist Lukas', we are told: "Am dritten September kamen die Großeltern an" (p.130). The next chapter, 'Ende der Großen Ferien', begins with the sentence: "Anfang September zogen die Großeltern in die Wohnung im Erdgeschoss ein" (p.132), thus ensuring a smooth progression between the chapters.

According to Hein's lector Angela Drescher, *Von allem Anfang an* was originally going to have an unambiguously chronological structure, but Hein decided to move away from this strict approach as it did not have the lightness of touch he wanted.<sup>33</sup> A complete absence of chronology (i.e. a wholly random episodic structure without links) made the sequencing of the chapters difficult, however, so Hein decided to revert towards a chronological sequence, but in an understated way, with the compromise of a less obvious marking of the progression through time. The one incident which does not seem to fit into the chronological development concerns Daniel's involvement in the school play. In the penultimate chapter, he recounts how he joined the school drama club. He is by now back in school after the summer holidays, suggesting, from the progression of chapters, that this is now September or October. Indeed, most of the chapter takes place in the autumn half-term holiday in Dresden. Early in the chapter, he mentions the prospect of travelling to Dresden during this holiday (p.144). In the next paragraph however he recalls: "An einem Dienstag im April

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<sup>33</sup> Angela Drescher, 'Unvollständige Rekonstruktion: Über das Lektorat des Buches "Von allem Anfang an" von Christoph Hein' in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein*, p.32.

ging ich zum ersten Mal in die Schulaula zur Probe". The absence of the pluperfect tense makes the references across time confusing. Given that this chapter was always after the 'Ende der Großen Ferien' chapter in all of the sequences of chapters which Drescher recalls, it is unlikely that Hein had made a mistake here in his chronological development. It is more probable that the references across the chapters did not have to be absolutely watertight for Hein when he restructured the story and that he did not always feel compelled to make the links absolutely clear. Indeed, the chapter could be interpreted as covering a longer period of time, starting from the spring (i.e. going back to the time before the start of the previous chapters) and then progressing to the autumn holidays.

*Von allem Anfang an* provides a very personal history of 1956. Indeed, in line with the priorities of most teenagers, Daniel's account displays a great deal of ignorance and apathy towards major historical developments. He shows a lack of interest in the big political stage during his visit to Dresden:

Während des Mittagessens gab es eine Solidaritätssammlung für irgendein Land oder für einen Befreiungskrieg. Ich glaube, es war für Korea, ich hatte nicht zugehört, weil ich mich mit dem Jungen neben mir über das Fußballspiel unterhalten hatte (p.157).

Daniel's classmates are not interested in politics and just welcome the events in Hungary as a means of diverting their teacher's attention from their homework (p.190). The politicised nature of the GDR school system is nonetheless never far from the surface. Daniel's brother is refused entry to the 'Oberschule' as, although he is capable of achieving the 'Bildungsziel', it is not certain that he

would attain the more ideological 'Erziehungsziel' (p.173). It is clear that the same will apply to Daniel. Teachers regularly give lectures about the problems and dangers of coming from a politically deviant background. The purpose of these lectures is:

Den politisch unreifen Schülern zu einer festen Weltanschauung zu verhelfen. Der politisch unreife Schüler war ich, das wusste die ganze Klasse. Darum musste ich jeden Morgen die Pressemeldungen vortragen, damit ich es lernte, die Zeitung richtig zu lesen und zu verstehen (p.194).

But generally the focus is on personal life away from major historical developments and ideology. Martin Kane wrote:

What unfolds is ostensibly personal, but at every turn it is entwined with the developing political and ideological circumstances which dictate how Daniel, his family and friends, live their lives. [...] But Hein also has the ability to penetrate to those corners of experience in the GDR which are untouched by ideology and the flow of monumental events [...].<sup>34</sup>

Fritz J. Raddatz appreciated the mood of the prose which, he felt, contributed to a fuller understanding of the political situation at that time: "Sie ist so atmosphärisch genau, daß man das Grollen des nahenden Gewitters zu hören meint".<sup>35</sup> *Der Spiegel's* reviewer praised the subtle way in which 'big' and 'small' history are combined in the story.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Kane, 'Christoph Hein: "Von allem Anfang an"', *Pen International*, 1/1998, pp.21-23, here pp.22-23.

<sup>35</sup> Fritz J. Raddatz, 'Besonnte Vergangenheit. Christoph Heins wenig nette Märchen', *Die Zeit*, 19 September 1997.

<sup>36</sup> Anon., 'Leuchtschrift am Kudamm', *Der Spiegel*, 25 August 1997, p.178.

In a newspaper interview shortly after the publication of *Von allem Anfang an*, Hein stressed the importance of personal memories in this subjective approach and admitted that they are as close to 'the truth' as the individual can get: "Sie sind das einzige, was wir wirklich haben. Sie sind für uns das Allerverlässlichste, auch da, wo sie falsch sind [...]. Für mich, wie für jedes Individuum, sind die Erinnerungen die absolute Wahrheit".<sup>37</sup> David Rock has suggested that this focus on the personal side of experience could be a productive way of confronting the problems facing reunified Germany:

Das allgemein Politische [wird] durch das Private, Persönliche erhellt. Meines Erachtens stellt sich vielleicht heraus, daß gerade die Literatur, die sich mit diesen spezifischen 'Innenansichten' auseinandersetzt, besonders dafür geeignet ist, die komplexe, neue deutsch-deutsche Gegenwart literarisch zu verarbeiten, ja sie vielleicht auch zu bewältigen.<sup>38</sup>

Hein is evidently determined for Daniel to be the sole interpreter of his own experiences. One understanding of *Von allem Anfang an* is that it provided Hein with an outlet through which to do just this himself in a thinly disguised autobiography.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND LINKS TO CAMUS

Daniel, like his creator Hein, was born towards the end of the Second World War to parents who subsequently had several more children. Both grew up in provincial GDR towns, and both had fathers who were pastors, a fact which

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Christian Eger, 'Der Kürbis, die Mauer und ein Gärtner in Berlin', *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, 7 October 1997.

<sup>38</sup> David Rock, 'Christoph Hein und Jurek Becker: Zwei kritische Autoren aus der DDR über die Wende und zum vereinten Deutschland', *German Life and Letters*, 2/1997, pp.182-200, here p.200.

made it necessary for them to leave the GDR for West Berlin in order to continue their schooling. In an interview ten years after the 'Wende', published in the programme notes to the production of his play *Bruch* by the Berlin-based company 'theater 89', Hein highlighted the impact this move to Berlin made on him by describing it as a bigger 'Bruch' in his personal development than the 'Wende'.<sup>39</sup> It should come as no surprise therefore to find this theme occupying a prominent place in his prose works.

Clearly, there are elements of Hein's own biography in *Von allem Anfang an*. Yet Hein has resisted any interpretations of his works as being purely autobiographical, stressing that he uses fictitious characters. A strictly autobiographical project would, we sense, have been too sterile, requiring him to undertake a painstaking search through his own memory which would leave many more gaps than his deliberately fragmented fictions do. Masks provided by fiction give him a degree of freedom. His playing down of the autobiographical elements of this book led him to claim that *Von allem Anfang an* was no more autobiographical than *Das Napoleon-Spiel*<sup>40</sup> and that just ten per cent of the book was fact and ninety per cent fiction.<sup>41</sup> Reviewers of the book also warned against reading it as a purely autobiographical text. Lothar Baier recognised that this was almost irresistible, but claimed that the reader would miss the literary text if (s)he did this.<sup>42</sup> Dennis Tate has shown that Hein deliberately creates slight differences between Daniel's and his own biography

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<sup>39</sup> This was conducted by Jörg Mihan and is dated 2 November 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Marlies Menge, 'Nur die Masken erlauben Freiheit', *Die Zeit*, 29 August 1997.

<sup>41</sup> Angela Drescher, 'Unvollständige Rekonstruktion: Über das Lektorat des Buches "Von allem Anfang an" von Christoph Hein' in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein*, p.39.

<sup>42</sup> Lothar Baier, 'Nackte Brüste und die Partei der Bestimmer', *die tageszeitung*, 15 October 1997. Reprinted in Volker Hage (ed.), *Deutsche Literatur 1997. Jahresüberblick* (Stuttgart, 1998), pp.134-137.

in terms of age and family background.<sup>43</sup> Hein has explained that he needs to know his subject matter well before he can write about it and that personal experience is therefore the primary source of material for him. In his view, the first eighteen years in a person's life are especially influential and character-forming. He claims that these artistic forays into childhood and youth, based on his own experience, have been a feature of all his previous works.<sup>44</sup>

The elements of autobiography which are undoubtedly present in *Von allem Anfang an* again provide a revealing point of reference to the work of Albert Camus in the sense that they reflect a desire to come to terms with the experience of childhood more directly than in the authors' earlier works of fiction. In the late 1950s, around the period described in *Von allem Anfang an*, Camus was in the process of writing *Le premier homme*,<sup>45</sup> a book which also looked as though it would shed new light on his childhood and family. We will never be able to be entirely sure how autobiographical *Le premier homme* would ultimately have become as Camus died before completing it, but the unfinished manuscript certainly shows far more obvious links to Camus's own life than his previous work had done.

Similarly to *Von allem Anfang an*, *Le premier homme* has as its protagonist a boy, Jacques Cormery, who, at the time recounted, is on the brink of adolescence. It is divided into two parts 'Recherche du père' and 'Le fils'. Having opened at the time of Jacques's birth, the action moves forward forty

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<sup>43</sup> Dennis Tate, "‘Mehr Freiheit zur Wahrheit’: The fictionalisation of adolescent experience in Christoph Hein's ‘Von allem Anfang an’" in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein*, p.120.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Gisela Hoyer, 'Ich bin der entscheidende Kritiker meiner Texte', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 15 October 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Albert Camus, *Le premier homme* (Paris, 1994). Page references will be to the 1995 Gallimard paperback edition.

years to when the adult Jacques is visiting the grave of his father (whom he never knew as he was killed in October 1914 at the Battle of the Marne – p.28) in Saint-Brieuc, France. Jacques then returns to his family home in Algeria, determined to discover more about this man, who, he is shocked to realise, had died at a younger age than he is at that moment. The action is then divided between the present day of 1953 and, predominantly, memories of his childhood.

Like *Von allem Anfang an*, *Le premier homme* has features which mirror the author's personal experience. Jacques is born in Algeria in 1913 (p.14), as was Camus. Camus's father, like Jacques's, also died in the First World War and was buried in Saint-Brieuc. The fictional and real-life mothers are both illiterate and dominated in the family household by a rather severe grandmother figure. Key episodes and memories in *Le premier homme* - such as when Jacques proves his courage by helping to kill a chicken (pp.211-216), the sight of a female colleague's parted knees and thighs as he picks up a box of pins from the floor during his vacation job (p.247) and the shame he experiences when lying about the terms of his summer employment (p.250) - are purely autobiographical.<sup>46</sup>

With Camus too, there is a sense of the author recognising the value of personal memories. Whilst Camus was in the process of writing *Le premier homme*, Olivier Todd quotes him as noting:

For years I've tried to live according to everyone else's morality and I forced myself to live like everyone else and to resemble everyone else. I said what was needed to unite people, even when I myself felt estranged

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<sup>46</sup> For all of this information on Camus's life, see Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus. A Life* (translated by Benjamin Ivry) (London, 1998), pp.3-15.



from them, and in the end, the catastrophe came. Now I wander amid the debris as an outlaw, drawn and quartered, alone and accepting to be so, resigned to my singularities and weaknesses. And I must reconstruct a truth after having lived a sort of lie all my life.

More simply, he told his friend Urbain Polge: "I'm writing a book about my family, and I'm happy about it, I've done good work".<sup>47</sup>

There are also points in the text which find an echo in Hein's account of childhood in *Von allem Anfang an*. As with Daniel, there are doubts about Jacques's future schooling, although in the case of *Le premier homme* this is due to the financial situation of the family rather than ideological conflicts. In both texts, an older female plays a pivotal role in the child's upbringing. For Jacques, it is his stern grandmother. His mother is a gentler influence (p.43, p.56). Jacques tells his teacher when the latter asks for his mother's opinion: "C'est ma grand-mère qui commande" (p.151). The narrator states: "Elle [the grandmother] avait dominé l'enfance de Jacques" (p.81). Although Daniel's "aunt" Magdalena is not strictly speaking a member of the family, and although she is a warmer character than Jacques's grandmother, both belong to the third generation and both have at least as strong an influence as the child's parents in the respective texts. Jacques and Daniel also share a fascination in the appearance of these older women and their routines, such as doing their hair:

Jacques d'ailleurs aimait à regarder sa mère ou sa grand-mère quand elles procédaient à la cérémonie de leur coiffure. Une serviette sur les épaules, la bouche pleine d'épingles, elles peignaient longuement les

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, pp.403-405. Todd also claims that Camus connected with his father through his protagonist Cormery.

longs cheveux blancs ou bruns, puis les relevaient, tiraient des bandeaux plats très serrés jusqu'au chignon sur la nuque (p.115).

Tante Magdalena trug jahraus jahrein lange Röcke, dunkelblaue oder schwarze mit kleinen Mustern, weißen Blümchen oder winzigen Schafen und Ziegen. Ihr Haar war grau und zu einem Dutt gesteckt. Einmal, als ich auch so früh zu ihr kam, hatte sie es noch nicht hochgebunden. Es fiel ihr bis zu den Hüften hinunter, und ich konnte ihr zusehen, wie sie es aufwickelte und mit Haarnadeln schnell und geschickt zusammensteckte (p.16).

Both texts are constructed around a narrative structure of a man looking back on events forty years previously (if we assume that the grown-up Daniel is recounting from around the time of the book being written i.e. the mid-1990s). Hein and Camus both reject the traditional autobiographical approach of identifying the author as the narrator. Instead, they opt for the fictitious characters of Jacques and Daniel as their protagonists. It is quite possible that Camus's intention was to re-examine his memories under the veil of his fictitious character. This would have provided him with the initial distance from his own experience necessary for a retrospective piecing together of the puzzle, and, like Hein, the licence to fill the gaps with fictional elements rather than trying to stick to 'the truth' of his life. A clue to the benefits of this distancing device can be found in a description of Jacques's friend Malan who is "le seul être qui eût une pensée personnelle, dans la mesure où il est possible d'en avoir une" (p.33). This is achieved despite, or indeed because "chaque fois que Malan commençait par: 'j'ai connu un homme qui..... ou un ami.....', on était sûr qu'il s'agissait de lui-même" (p.35). The implication is that it is easier to recount personal experience through a fictional character.

*Le premier homme* is different to *Von allem Anfang an* however in that it is told from a third-person perspective, whereas Daniel recounts his memories in the first person. Jacques does not recall his memories himself, rather the third-person narrator crosses the timespan in the text to when Jacques was a boy. It may have been the decision to avoid the first person which made it difficult for Camus to keep the author's perspective out of the narrative, for the mask of his fictive character regularly slips in *Le premier homme*. The fluctuation between fact and fiction for the name of his teacher (M. Bernard/M. Germain) indicates the dilemma Camus faced in distancing himself from the action. Other names are not yet fixed in the text, such as his mother, who begins as Lucie (possibly a reference to Camus's father Lucien) before switching to Catherine (Camus's mother's name), and his uncle, who is sometimes called Ernest and other times Etienne, the latter being the name of Camus's uncle.

At the end of the first section, the third-person mask slips completely and the third person and first person appear in consecutive sentences: "L'avion descendait maintenant vers Alger. Jacques pensait au petit cimetière de Saint-Brieuc où les tombes des soldats étaient mieux conservées que celles de Mondovi. La Méditerranée séparait en moi deux univers" (p.181). Olivier Todd notes that, unlike *Von allem Anfang an*, there is no humour in *Le premier homme*, "as if the writer could not yet get beyond pity and tenderness for his characters".<sup>48</sup> Hein, by contrast, has resolved these uncertainties and gives Daniel greater freedom as an autonomous character, who is able to recall his childhood himself. In this way, Hein manages to keep the mask in place.

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<sup>48</sup> Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus. A Life*, p.405.

Camus is also less disciplined than Hein in his construction of a chronological framework for his story. Hein may be more relaxed with the temporal structure of *Von allem Anfang an* than in other works, but a progression over a number of months is still apparent nonetheless. *Le premier homme* describes events from Jacques's childhood in a more approximate timespan. It is significant that during Jacques's happiest days on the beach with his friends, "ils en oubliaient même l'heure, courant de la plage à la mer [...]" (p.55). Happiness and freedom for Jacques result from escaping temporal constraints. We are told that the members of Jacques's poor family do not lead structured lives, something which would have facilitated the memory process:

La mémoire des pauvres déjà est moins nourrie que celles des riches, elle a moins de repères dans l'espace puisqu'ils quittent rarement le lieu où ils vivent, moins de repères aussi dans le temps d'une vie uniforme et grise (p.79).

It is perhaps inevitable then that Camus's story is less structured than Hein's.

*Le premier homme*, like *Von allem Anfang an*, is told with a warmer tone than the author's previous work. It begins with a flamboyant and evocative description of clouds moving eastwards from the Atlantic as Jacques's family struggles across a hostile desert. Camus's story goes even further than *Von allem Anfang an*, however, as a sense of nostalgia for the past is apparent. With Jacques being given less autonomy than Daniel to recount his own memories, and with the third-person narrator struggling to maintain his distance, the reader is led to suspect that it is the author's voice which is audible in nostalgic comments such as: "Les plus belles journées étaient celles de la belle saison

[...]” (p.51) and “Oh! Oui, c’était ainsi, la vie de cet enfant avait été ainsi, la vie avait été ainsi dans l’île pauvre du quartier” (p.255). As we have seen, Camus has described his feeling of liberation at no longer trying to speak other people’s truth. This, coupled with the connection he made to his father in writing the book, are credible reasons for the element of nostalgia in *Le premier homme*. In Hein’s case, the mask of fiction is more firmly in place, allowing him a degree of distance to such feelings. Although *Von allem Anfang an* is written with a warmer tone than Hein’s previous prose, Hein has stated his wish to avoid “ein[en] vergoldet[en] Rückblick” in the story.<sup>49</sup> The range of examples of emotional conflict at the heart of the story, such as the frosty atmosphere between Daniel’s parents, Daniel’s sense of being let down by Kade and his bitter-sweet experiences of sexual awakening, plus the conflict on a broader political level (Daniel’s grandfather is sacked from his post as manager of an agricultural estate for refusing to join the SED, and Daniel is prevented from attending the ‘Oberschule’ due his family’s religious beliefs) contribute to his success in achieving this goal.

## CONCLUSION

The fact that Hein has chosen to return to the GDR as the setting for *Von allem Anfang an* instead of focusing on more contemporary material could suggest that he still sees unresolved issues in the past and that it is important that they should be understood. The focus in *Von allem Anfang an* remains on a personal level, with the broader historical picture providing the background. As Martin Kane states: “The context here is always that of the GDR, and we are seldom far from

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Martin Doerry and Volker Hage, ‘Ich vermisse die alte BRD’, *Der Spiegel*, 9 November 1998, p.278.

a sense of lurking oppressiveness and ideological rigidity. But it is never forced upon us".<sup>50</sup>

From a narrative point of view, *Von allem Anfang an* reveals similarities to *Horns Ende*. Whilst acknowledging elements of continuity from the character of Thomas in *Horns Ende* to Daniel in *Von allem Anfang an*, Hein identifies the "warmer temperature" at which Daniel is portrayed as being the most important difference between them.<sup>51</sup> Both of these characters share elements with Hein's own biography. Yet Hein's determination to maintain a fictive element in his work should not be underestimated. Writers such as Günter de Bruyn have attempted to provide a more comprehensive view of the GDR era in conventional autobiographical form, an approach which has provoked criticism from some commentators on the grounds of its superficial coverage of a longer timespan and its often dubious claim to be achieving greater historical truth than is possible in fiction.<sup>52</sup>

Hein keeps his mask of fictional elements in place, something which Camus, in a book written at a similar stage in his career, also did, but with less conviction. Despite differences in approach between Hein and Camus, however, it is worth underlining that these texts are their most obviously autobiographical works. Both recount events in the life of a boy on the cusp of adolescence and both are told in a warmer tone than that to which we are accustomed from these authors. In *Von allem Anfang an*, Hein has chosen a narrow temporal framework to present personal experience in a fictive form. Such a return to the past is not a way of avoiding current issues, but rather a first step which all Germans of his

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<sup>50</sup> Martin Kane, 'Christoph Hein: "Von allem Anfang an"', *Pen International*, 1/1998, p.23.

<sup>51</sup> Hein made this comment to me in Swansea in March 1998.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Michael Opitz, 'Ohne zu stören', *Freitag*, 20 December 1996.

generation might take if they wish to come to a proper understanding of the effects of forty years of division. The real significance of Hein's decision to return to the GDR as a setting for his prose is that he is highlighting the right, and indeed need, of former GDR citizens not to abandon their past.

## CONCLUSION

It is possible to identify strong elements of continuity running through Christoph Hein's prose-writing career. His own life provides a constant source of material for his fiction, ranging from elements of personal experience, as found in varying degrees in *Der fremde Freund*, *Horns Ende*, *Der Tangospieler* and *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, to a text which features a character who has significant autobiographical features, Daniel in *Von allem Anfang an*. His prose consistently challenges the image of a 'sozialistische Menschengemeinschaft', proclaimed by the GDR's political leaders, by depicting individuals who have withdrawn from their society. The texts are generally written with accessible language and structured around a strong temporal framework. The questions of what constitutes history and how characters access the past through their memories is a recurrent theme. Hein displays talents for creating convincing characters with variations in terms of age and gender and for mastering a range of narrative perspectives.

In chapter 1, we saw Hein depict, for the first time, characters who have difficulty in confronting issues from their past. *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois*



can be divided into pre-twentieth-century and twentieth-century texts with a common theme throughout of the 'small history' of characters' lives being set against the context of broader historical developments. Hein writes from a variety of narrative perspectives in this collection, which can be regarded as a useful sequence of experiments giving him the confidence to tackle the subsequent longer prose projects. Chapter 2 dealt with the text which ensured Hein's breakthrough at home and abroad, *Der fremde Freund*. Here we see someone who tries to cut off her past and her links with the rest of her society as she withdraws to her entirely subjective perspective. The evident problems which this text posed the state authorities were not least connected with the fact that Hein did not provide an alternative viewpoint to Claudia's, leaving it to readers to accept or reject her view on life. I have argued that Hein himself does not subscribe to Claudia's 'Weltanschauung' and that a subtext challenging what she says ("Mir geht es gut") can be made out. *Horns Ende*, the subject of chapter 3, provoked the greatest row of all Hein's books in the GDR. It contains a spectrum of narrators, without producing one definitive account of the events surrounding Horn's death. There is a degree of urgency in the tone of the book, with the suggestion that the characters have to strain their memories to find the truth in the past, which contemporary society appears to have forgotten. In chapter 4, which focused on *Der Tangospieler*, we encountered another character who wants to forget the past. A sense of optimism is created when Dallow seems to be resisting the temptation to forget what has happened to him, but this is quashed when he retakes his position in society by returning to his institute. The perspective here is a new one for Hein for he employs a third-person narrative voice which recounts the story of a character in the past, rather than using a first-person perspective of characters recalling their past

themselves. The subject matter, in particular the protagonist Dallow, reveals strong elements of continuity in relation to Hein's earlier prose. Continuity also characterised Hein's second collection of short stories, *Exekution eines Kalbes*, which were completed in 1990 (even though the collection was not published until after *Das Napoleon-Spiel*). Again we witness Hein using a range of perspectives and writing to particular stylistic disciplines in order to recount individual destinies against their wider socio-political background. Although *Das Napoleon-Spiel*, examined in chapter 6, also revealed some features of continuity to Hein's pre-'Wende' prose, such as aspects of personal experience and the influence of Albert Camus's work, it contained new and innovative elements. Wörle is the most cynical character Hein has created and this is the first book which Hein has located primarily in the West. I have argued that whilst the issue of the imbalance between individual freedom and social responsibility can be identified in this text, it would be an oversimplification to put this down to Hein summarily condemning his new society. After thoroughly chronicling the GDR, it was time for a new challenge. The final work featured in this thesis, *Von allem Anfang an*, sees Hein returning to the GDR as the setting for his prose. The search for a beginning in the past, at the centre of this story, is something which other Hein characters, particularly Thomas from *Horns Ende*, undertake. I have attempted to show in chapter 7, however, that this work did represent a further development in Hein's prose. We see less of the grown-up character here and the urgency to find the truth in the past diminishes. Personal memories become the focal point in this text of fictive autobiography, which gives a clear indication that Hein does not intend to abandon his GDR background as a fertile source of material for his work in reunified Germany.

A common element throughout these chapters is that, no matter which narrative perspective is adopted, no clear 'message' is conveyed. Characters are not judged or presented as role models: Wörle, for instance, is not explicitly condemned in *Das Napoleon-Spiel*. They do not narrate from a position of superiority to the other characters or readers. In this sense, Hein exemplifies David Lodge's assessment that modernist fiction "employs [...] a single limited point of view, or multiple viewpoints, all more or less limited or fallible".<sup>1</sup> Yet although readers are not given any easy moralistic answers, they are offered, as we saw from the reception of *Einladung zum Lever Bourgeois* in chapter 1, intellectual stimulation about the scenarios and characters they encounter in this prose. Hein thus confirms the suggestion made by Randall Stevenson that "it may be that the most moral sort of text is the one that leaves readers free to determine morality for themselves".<sup>2</sup> Equally, Hein can be counted among the number of the "real artists", as Camus puts it, who "s'obligent à comprendre au lieu de juger".<sup>3</sup>

Links to Camus's work are perhaps most obvious between *Der fremde Freund* and *Der Tangospieler* and *L'étranger*, on the one hand, and between *Das Napoleon-Spiel* and *La chute* on the other, but his influence, as I have argued, can be felt throughout Hein's work. The two writers display a similar progression through their prose-writing career, beginning with a clipped narrative about someone living in the margins of his/her society, progressing through a novel with a broader tone and range of characters, later followed by a highly technical monologue and culminating in a book which reveals a greater

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<sup>1</sup> David Lodge, 'The language of modernist fiction: metaphor and metonymy' in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism 1890-1930* (London, 1976), pp.481-496, here p.481.

<sup>2</sup> Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction. An Introduction* (Hertfordshire, 1992), p.218.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Camus, *Discours de Suède* (Paris, 1958), p.13.

degree of autobiography than elsewhere in their work. This development encompasses a range of narrative perspectives, generally simple syntactic structures and a cool tone. Furthermore, as I have sought to illustrate throughout my thesis, particular scenes from Hein's work lend themselves to a comparison to episodes from Camus's prose, such as descriptions of funerals in *Der fremde Freund* and *L'étranger* and images of a boy's fascination with the grooming routines of older women in *Von allem Anfang an* and *Le premier homme*. As we saw at the beginning of this thesis, Hein described Camus as being part of a line of French thinkers who displayed a "réflexion rationaliste", "analyse critique", "curiosité intellectuelle" and "esprit ouvert et novateur", all of which could equally be used to describe Hein's work as a writer and intellectual.

Like Camus, Hein has shown a wider commitment to his society beyond his devotion to literature. This element of his work has always been present, despite Hein sometimes conveying the impression that it is something which he takes on reluctantly. He challenged the censorship process in the GDR, and, as we can see through the correspondence between his lector, publishers and state officials, confidence in the legitimacy of this line grew perceptibly throughout the 1980s, not least after Hein had given his courageous speech in 1987 about the illegal and offensive nature of censorship in the GDR.

This public role was, as I argued in chapter 5, most pronounced around the time of the 'Wende'. At this time, Hein initially pushed for a reform of his society through speeches, interviews, articles and work on the investigation committee examining the allegations of Stasi brutality at public demonstrations. He also warned against a take-over by the West. Such a response by Hein surprised

some commentators who had clearly expected him to be more dismissive of the GDR. Even after it became clear that there was no backing for a further socialist experiment, Hein still showed a commitment to his public role.

Since the publication of the last book examined in this thesis, Hein has maintained an active role in public life. In the year after *Von allem Anfang an* appeared, Hein confirmed his commitment to highlighting the scourge of xenophobia by reading his 1991 article on this issue at a demonstration in front of the Brandenburg Gate.<sup>4</sup> He has also exploited his position on the board of directors of the weekly newspaper *Freitag* for this cause, using it as a platform to support Günter Grass's stand on asylum seekers' rights in Germany.<sup>5</sup>

The culmination of this public role came in 1998 when the German Pen club chose Hein as its first all-German president.<sup>6</sup> His election was welcomed in the media. Ingo Arend, writing in *Freitag*, stated: "Die Wahl Christoph Heins zum Präsidenten des vereinten Clubs [ist] ein gutes Signal für einen Neuanfang. Der 1944 geborene Schriftsteller pflegt geistige Unabhängigkeit bis fast zur Autarkie".<sup>7</sup> Thomas Rathnow, anticipating Hein's election on the eve of the Pen conference, wrote in *Der Tagesspiegel*: "Mit Hein stünde dem deutschen Pen wieder ein Schriftsteller von literarischem Rang vor, dazu einer, der durch sein Verhalten in der früheren DDR politisch angesehen und glaubwürdig ist".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The 'Lesung gegen Rechts' on 20 June 1998 was organised to prevent the NPD from parading through the Brandenburg Gate. See Irmtraud Gutschke, 'Nur Protest – das wäre zu wenig', *Neues Deutschland*, 22 June 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Christoph Hein, 'Ein Landfriedenspreis für Günter Grass', *Freitag*, 24 October 1997.

<sup>6</sup> For early interviews on his work as Pen president see Ingo Arend and Detlev Lücke, 'Erschöpfung ist eine Produktivkraft', *Freitag*, 13 November 1998 and Martin Doerry and Volker Hage, 'Ich vermisse die alte BRD', *Der Spiegel*, 9 November 1998, pp.277-281.

<sup>7</sup> Ingo Arend, 'Kunststückchen', *Freitag*, 6 November 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Rathnow, 'Einig vor Erschöpfung', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 29 October 1998. Christoph Dieckmann, 'Dem Chronist wird König. Christoph Hein – der neue Pen-Präsident', *Die Zeit*, 5 November 1998 also refers to the widespread applause at Hein's election.

Hein's two-year stint as president saw him, among other things, lead a meeting in Berlin for Iranian writers,<sup>9</sup> argue the case for retail prices in the book trade<sup>10</sup> and question Nato's bombing of Serbia.<sup>11</sup> He also gave several interviews in which he underlined the difficulties in the process of rapprochement between East and West.<sup>12</sup> As at other times in his career, however, his commitment to this public role also left him yearning to return to his ivory tower and his work as a writer. He stated in a 1999 interview: "Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms. Nur dort kann ich arbeiten. Als Präsident des Pen muß ich diesen Turm freilich oft, allzu oft verlassen".<sup>13</sup> At the end of his presidency, an editorial in *Die Welt* praised Hein for having restored Pen's original sense of purpose:

Der aus dem Amt geschiedene Pen-Präsident Christoph Hein hat seinen Club der Dichter derart erfolgreich aus den Querelen, aus den Schlagzeilen und in ruhige Bahnen geführt, so straff organisiert, daß der Pen bei seiner Nürnberger Tagung endlich zurückkehren konnte zu seinen eigentlichen Aufgaben.<sup>14</sup>

Hein's status as one of the leading German intellectuals of his generation was confirmed most recently when he found himself among twenty writers and intellectuals invited by Gerhard Schröder to the Federal Chancellor's Office to

<sup>9</sup> See Jörg Magenau, 'Mit langem Atem', *die tageszeitung*, 15 January 1999.

<sup>10</sup> dpa, 'Pen-Club-Präsident Hein setzt auf dauerhafte Buchpreisbindung', *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, 16 July 1999.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance Antje Schmelcher, 'Blindflug ins Gewissen', *Die Welt*, 10 May 1999; Christoph Dieckmann, 'Bomben auf Ankara', *Die Zeit*, 29 April 1999; Jörg Magenau, 'Der lange Weg zur richtigen Resolution', *die tageszeitung*, 26 April 1999.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance interviews with Jürgen Seidel, 'Wir sind uns weniger nah als 1990', *Ostsee-Zeitung*, 6 May 1998 and with Martin Doerry and Volker Hage, 'Ich vermisse die alte BRD', *Der Spiegel*, 9 November 1998, pp.277-281.

<sup>13</sup> Peter von Becker and Moritz Müller-Wirth, 'Brauchen wir eine Amnestie für DDR-Eliten, Herr Hein?', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 13 January 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Elmar Krekeler, 'Ein Ort, um zu denken', *Die Welt*, 15 May 2000.

discuss the campaign against terrorism in the wake of the 11 September attacks in the USA.<sup>15</sup>

Like the Pen club, Hein too has been able to return to what he describes as his 'real work'. In 2000, with a new publisher (Suhrkamp), he published the novel *Willenbrock* about a second-hand car salesman in post-reunification Berlin. Coming three years after *Von allem Anfang an*, it showed that Hein is still producing major prose works at roughly the same rate as in the GDR. *Willenbrock* was not as positively received as *Von allem Anfang an*. Marcel Reich-Ranicki went as far as to claim that Hein cannot write without censorship.<sup>16</sup> It did confirm though that Hein is maintaining his keen chronicler's gaze in his (new) society: *Willenbrock* focuses on feelings of insecurity in contemporary Berlin. Hein reverts to the third-person perspective here, although there is considerably more dialogue than in his earlier work, meaning that characters are given greater freedom to express themselves, rather than just being depicted by the narrator.

Over the course of the first decade of reunified Germany, Hein felt that his warning against euphoria at the time of the 'Wende' had been borne out. Whilst he had been criticised at the time for being too pessimistic in saying that the process of reunification would take at least as long as the two states had been divided, it is now clear that this is actually an optimistic view, he contends.<sup>17</sup> In May 1999, he expressed the opinion: "Ich habe heute das Gefühl, daß wir uns

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<sup>15</sup> See for instance Günter Hofmann, 'Kanzlers Wende', *Die Zeit*, 15 November 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Fritz-Jochen Kopka, 'Völlig verloren', *Die Woche*, 14 July 2000 refers to Reich-Ranicki's comments on his television programme 'Das Literarische Quartett'.

<sup>17</sup> Peter von Becker and Moritz Müller-Wirth, 'Brauchen wir eine Amnestie für DDR-Eliten, Herr Hein?', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 13 January 1999.

weniger nahe sind als 1990".<sup>18</sup> With unemployment rates in the new Länder still more than twice as high as in the old Länder, to quote just one example of the social divide, Hein can feel confirmed in his views. He has also noted that he is still described as an East German, a political geography, for really he is today a North German.<sup>19</sup>

Hein undoubtedly regretted that the 'Wende' turned into a take-over of the GDR by the West rather than being a more genuine process of reunification, but, unlike many GDR writers, he has since focused on the artistic opportunities which have been created. He has settled in reunified Germany more successfully than most other GDR writers and he could not be included among the ranks of writers who have found themselves in a 'furor melancholicus', as Emmerich has put it.<sup>20</sup> Hein acknowledges that some of his colleagues feel as though they have lost something following the collapse of the GDR, but says he feels relieved that the pressure of the public role has decreased since the 'Wende'.<sup>21</sup> He has not suffered a confidence-crisis since 1989 and, in many respects, his perception of his work has not changed very much. This is partly due to the sense of detachment he had always felt from the GDR, a feeling very much apparent in his claim that "I was an enemy of the state as a baby - that sharpens one's focus".<sup>22</sup> This sense of detachment helped to save him from experiencing overwhelming feelings of loss at the GDR's demise. As we saw in chapter 2,

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Jürgen Seidel, 'Wir sind uns weniger nah als 1990', *Ostsee-Zeitung*, 6 May 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Ingo Arend and Detlev Lücke, 'Erschöpfung ist eine Produktivkraft', *Freitag*, 13 November 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), p.16.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Bill Niven and David Clarke, 'Ich arbeite nicht in der Abteilung Prophet' in Bill Niven and David Clarke (eds), *Contemporary German Writers: Christoph Hein* (Cardiff, 2000), pp.14-24, here p.24.

<sup>22</sup> Transcript of an interview with Hein by Holly Aylett for a programme on culture in the GDR, entitled 'A Footnote in History?', shown on 'The South Bank Show', *ITV*, October 1990.



Hein was once quoted as saying that 're-entering the flames' is a fundamental part of human experience. He has done this in reunified Germany, but, at the same time, has succeeded in maintaining the cool gaze which characterised his prose work in the GDR.

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